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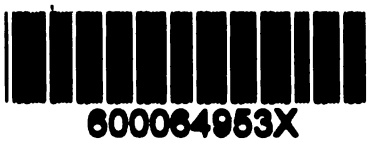
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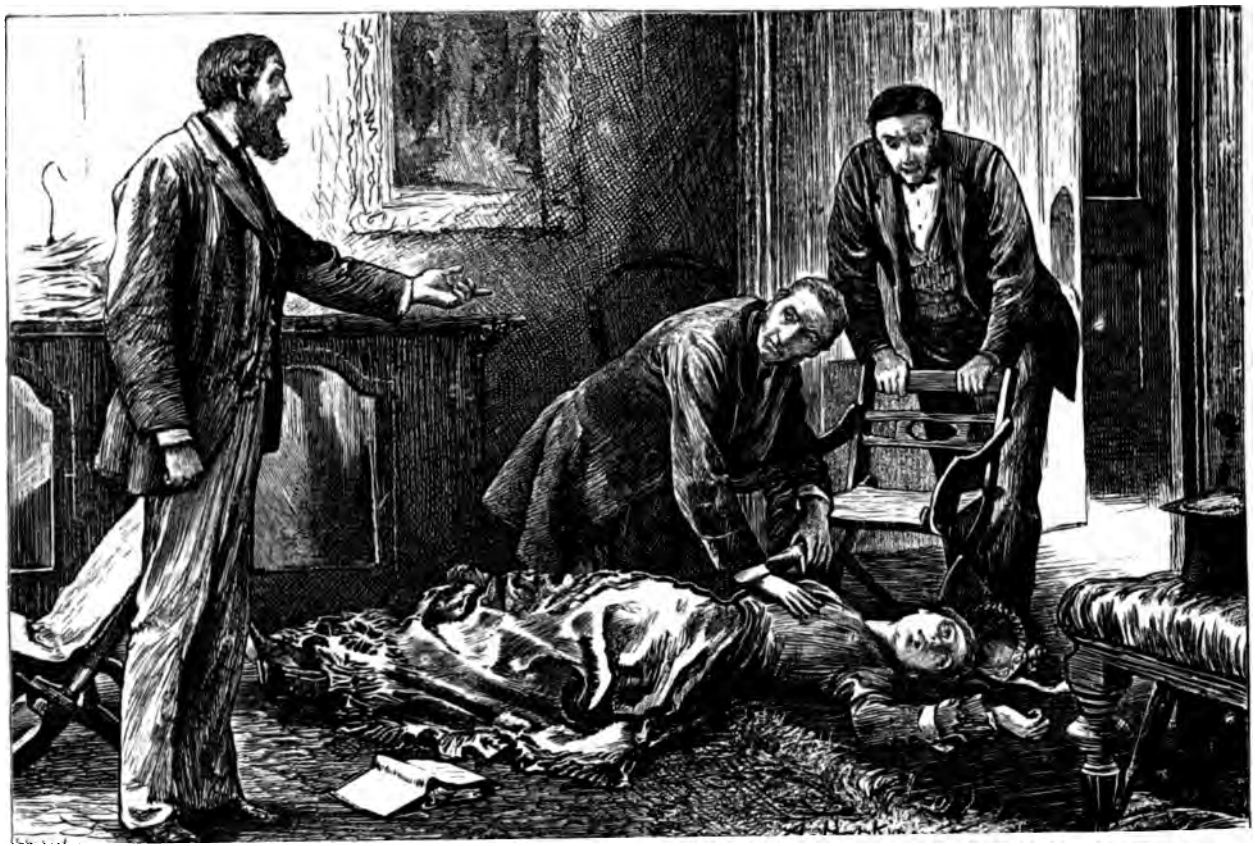

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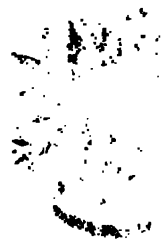
'Thus, alas, is the result.'



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JAMES PAYN

AUTHOR OF

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'Not in the sky, not in the midst of the sea,
Not in the clefts of the mountains,
Is there a spot in the whole world
Where a man may be freed from an evil deed'

Buddhist Proverb

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WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARTHUR HOPKINS

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. II.

London
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1878

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251. a. 69.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

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BY PROXY.

CHAPTER I.

THE IRON MELTS.

Some people are so clever that they find it easy to discover other men's motives; but Raymond Pennicuick was not of this clever sort, and it is therefore not surprising that he failed to account to himself for his father's behaviour as respected the wife and daughter of his dead friend. His disinclination—nay, his downright refusal—to visit them, on pretence of engagements in town, shocked Raymond's sense of propriety; no matter how painful might have been the interview, it seemed to him downright cowardice to shirk so obvious a duty. On the other hand, there was his father's offer to benefit them pecuniarily, which, if not handsome, might be deemed sufficient, in any person not bound to them by ties of blood, and which he felt to be liberal when taken into consideration with his father's views about money matters. Under any other circumstance he would not even to himself have admitted so much to his parent's detriment; had the persons concerned been indifferent to him, he would have made excuses, and, so far as his conscience permitted, even taken the other side; but

when our feelings are excited both for and against, we are liable to have the operation which by oculists is called 'couching' performed on us. Here, then, was a man by nature loth to part with his money, making a liberal provision for individuals who had no legal claim on him, but at the same time so wanting in proper feeling as not to see the necessity of telling them with his own lips of how it had fared with their nearest and dearest in his last hours.

Nor could his son honestly find an apology for him on the score of extreme sensibility. That the subject of Conway's death should be distasteful to his father was natural enough; but that he should have ignored it, as he had done, throughout their late interview, was inexplicable to Raymond. To *him*, at least, the details might have been confided; and at all events some hint might have been given of Conway's state of mind and behaviour; above all, those last fond words should have been repeated to him, which, however feeble in themselves, have so intense a significance for those who love and survive us. It was incredible that a man like Conway, tender-hearted and passionately attached to at least one of the members of his little family, could have left the world without a word of farewell.

Raymond's duty, however, was plain enough: he must go down to Richmond; make out the best case for his father that was possible, and, above all, endeavour to persuade the widow and her daughter to receive assistance from his hand. One cause of embarrassment was upon this occasion spared to him; his errand was such that no allusion to his love for Nelly need be apprehended from him; for though the subject was forbidden, it was in his thoughts, and could

be read by her, he fancied (and not without reason), in his tell-tale face and tone.

The house at Richmond bore externally the same appearance as usual; he was pleased to see that the tiny plot of ground that lay between it and the road was as full of flowers and kept as neatly as before, though he little knew that this was the work of Nelly's own hands, and not of those of the 'odd man,' who had heretofore performed the duties of gardener. But, within, the signs of the altered circumstances of its inmates were at once apparent. The door was 'answered' to him no longer by the trim housemaid, but by a little maid-of-all-work of tender years, who held it half open in her hand, after the manner of her kind, as doubtful whether the visitor was to be admitted, or left standing on the steps outside, till his errand should be made known to 'missus.' The presentation of his card seemed only to add to her difficulties; she turned it over and over as if it was a cryptogram which she could not decipher (for, indeed, the art of reading was unknown to her), and then running to the foot of the stairs, exclaimed, 'Oh, please, Miss Conway, here is a young man as wants you.'

It was quite true, but under the circumstances a little embarrassing, and doubtless accounted for Nelly's heightened colour when she presented herself.

She greeted him with a sad smile and a grasp of the hand, which, though eloquent of friendship, somehow seemed to speak of love's divorce; and led the way into the parlour.

'You have seen your father, Raymond,' were her first words.

'Yes, Nelly. I have seen him. He is, I am sorry to say, far from well; he looks aged and even broken. I think,' he added,

'if your mother saw him she would acknowledge, notwithstanding her prejudice against him, that he had a heart.'

'Do not let us talk of prejudices, Raymond, at a time like this,' said Nelly reprovingly; 'I feel as if I stood beside my father's grave. What word does Mr. Pennicuick bring us of him?'

'He has little to say, Nelly; and it pains him to say even that little. I have come to-day in his place——'

'What? Will not Mr. Pennicuick come to see us?'

'Nay, it is not "will;" he is really not equal to it just at present. He is exhausted by grief and travel, and he has sent me as his messenger to say all that is kind and—and—friendly, and to make a certain proposition to you which I hope—I do most earnestly hope—Mrs. Conway and yourself may take into your favourable consideration.'

It had cost poor Raymond a good deal to say this much, and, though he was conscious that he had not expressed it very happily, it was a great relief to him to have 'got it over;' his disappointment therefore was considerable when Nelly only replied, 'And what have you to tell us about dear papa?' as though she had not even heard him.

'He met his fate, it seems, dear Nelly, very suddenly; directly he was condemned, my father started for Shanghae to endeavour to procure his pardon, or at least his reprieve, and when he got back—all was over.'

'What? was there no message? no good-bye? no word to me, nor to my mother?'

'He sent his love, his dear love; he bade you not grieve for him over-much, and blessed you.'

'And was there no line of farewell? Even a scrap of his hand-

writing, he must have known, would have been inexpressibly dear to me, and I am sure he would have thought of that.'

'He did not think of it, dear Nelly, or at least there was none. Consider the frightful position in which he found himself. The suddenness of his calamity, the shock——'

Nelly shook her head. 'It was not like papa, Raymond,' interrupted she. 'He was so brave, so careless of self, and so thoughtful for others. Even when I was a child, and he upon the eve of battle, he once wrote——' Here she broke down and sobbed as though her heart would break.

'Don't cry, don't cry,' whispered Raymond imploringly; 'I can't bear it, darling.'

Her sorrow so distressed him that he was himself unconscious of the loving epithet he used; moved though she was, it did not however escape Nelly's notice, and, though she did not resent it, it had the effect of calming her at once.

'Forgive me for my selfishness, Raymond; it is wrong to give such way to weakness. There must be some mistake, I think, about dear papa, which will be cleared up hereafter. You say Mr. Pennicuick is ill; he may have forgotten things which, to us in our forlorn condition, are of great moment. We must have patience a little longer.'

'But indeed it is not that, dear Nelly. My father is quite himself. He has been thinking a great deal about you—you and your mother,' he added hastily, for he saw the colour rush into the young girl's cheek: it was terrible to him that she should believe even for a moment that he was referring to his suit. 'What he wishes to do—the only service he can now do for his dead friend—is to protect his dear ones; he cannot control fate, but

he can mitigate its harshness. You must permit him to do that, Nelly.'

'I don't quite understand, Raymond.'

'That is my fault; I am stupid in expressing myself. My father wishes to help you in a material way: and yet, so that you should feel no sense of obligation. Three or four hundred a year is a mere nothing to him; while to you, with your simple habits and economical ways, it would be of some service. He wishes, without condition of any kind,' added Raymond significantly, 'to make you, that is your mother and yourself, this modest allowance.'

'It is very kind and very liberal of him, Raymond, but——'

'No, it is not liberal,' interrupted the young man emphatically; 'it is purposely the reverse of liberal, in order that you may feel no sense of dependence or obligation; the only stipulation, indeed, he made was that there should be no thanks.'

'I have done your father wrong, Raymond, for I did not think him capable of this; I thank him, or, if he will not have thanks, I thank you for him; it is most generous and most delicate; I for my part feel as—as—grateful to him as though we could accept it.'

'And why, in Heaven's name, should you not accept it? Does a man owe nothing to his best friend when he is dead? no debt which a sigh or a tear cannot discharge? Is it not as cruel to deny him such a mournful pleasure as to refuse to allow him to pay him the last rites, to follow him to his grave? I cannot think you will be so—so——'

'So churlish, if you will, Raymond,' put in Nelly, with a sad smile. 'It is one of the many disadvantages of poverty that it

often makes one appear ungracious. For my own part, I must needs say that I prefer to keep my independence. But this is a matter to which I have no right to reply for certain. It is my mother who must decide.'

'And you will use your influence to induce her to decline this offer?'

'No: since you wish it, Raymond, I will be quite passive.'

'That is because you have such confidence in her prejudices that you are sure——'

'Hush! here is mamma,' said Nelly hurriedly: and at the same moment Mrs. Conway entered the room.

Among the many ills to which obesity is subject there is this peculiar misfortune, that when in sorrow the very stout and florid do not evince it by their appearance: we are accustomed to associate melancholy with a lean frame and a pale face, and fat people cannot 'bring themselves down,' like jockeys, to suit the exigencies of the occasion.

The misfortune that had befallen Mrs. Conway had not one whit reduced her ample proportions, or robbed her cheeks of a single rose—or peony. It was only to a close observer that the signs of trouble were manifest, in the lack-lustre eye and the trembling hand. Her voice, too, had lost its former testiness, and become soft and gentle. 'I am glad to see you, Raymond,' she began; then suddenly stopped as though she read his errand and in a harsh, almost defiant tone, inquired, 'What is your news?'

'My father has come home, Mrs. Conway.'

'I concluded as much,' said she, closing her eyes and pressing her lips together like one in pain. 'Well?'

He knew this was no inquiry about his father's health, for she

never gave herself the trouble to affect an interest in him. It was simply a sign to him that she was prepared to listen to whatever he might have to say.

'The steamer will arrive at Southampton on Tuesday, Mrs. Conway, my father having been obliged to leave it from ill health, and return overland. It will bring four large cases, I was instructed to tell you, directed hither. I believe nothing has been left behind of your poor husband's property. His own servant, who was deeply attached to him, assisted by my father himself, undertook——'

'What does your father say?' The interruption was not violent, though abrupt, but the tone of it was singularly keen and searching.

'He has little to say, dear Mrs. Conway. The catastrophe, it seems, was very sudden and unexpected, and my father's mind was wholly taken up with efforts—vain, alas! to avert it. He started for Shanghae after but a brief interview—it was all that was allowed him—and except that your dear husband sent you a loving farewell, and invoked God's blessing upon you both——'

'That is false,' put in Mrs. Conway, in a terrible voice; 'there was more than that.'

'Indeed, dear madam, my father assures me that there was nothing else.'

'He lies.'

There was a painful silence. It was plain that argument with the poor lady was out of the question. Her face was the very incarnation of obstinate conviction.

'Dear mamma,' said Nelly softly, 'pray remember that you are speaking to Mr. Pennicuick's son.'

Mrs. Conway did not seem to hear her; her eyes were riveted upon Raymond's face, but her thoughts were far away.

'Why does he not come here?' inquired she presently in sharp, incisive tones. 'Why does he keep in hiding?'

'My father is greatly exhausted with his journey, and, as I have told you, very unwell. He did not feel equal, just at present, to converse with you on so sad a subject.'

'Not equal? *Bah*! he had not courage enough.'

There was another painful pause.

'Perhaps,' said Nelly hesitatingly, 'there may be a letter, or something, in dear papa's travelling desk; I know he took it with him wherever it was possible.'

She looked inquiringly at Raymond, so that he was obliged to speak.

'Indeed, dear Nelly, I am afraid there was nothing of the kind. My father made search everywhere, as it was his duty to do, in case there should be a will.'

'We are beggars, of course,' observed Mrs. Conway calmly.

'No, indeed, madam,' began Raymond; and he was about at once to mention his father's offer, when Nelly restrained him. She was right, he felt; it was a most inopportune time to speak to Mrs. Conway upon such a subject.

'We are not beggars, mamma, unless we beg,' said Nelly quietly; 'and there is no need to beg.'

'It is as well to beg as to slave oneself to death as you are doing,' replied Mrs. Conway bitterly. Then she burst into tears and began to rock herself to and fro upon her chair, quite regardless and perhaps unconscious of the presence of her visitor.

'Go, Raymond, go,' whispered Nelly; and the young man rose

with the intention of withdrawing at once without exciting the widow's observation. He was distressed and shocked to an extreme degree, not only at the poor lady's condition, but at the words she had spoken to her daughter, which confirmed his worst suspicions as to the efforts she was making to maintain the little household. It was painful to him that Nelly should work at all for her daily bread; but that she should be overworking herself was terrible. And yet the reception that his father's proposition had met with, even thus far, and from her whom he had thought the less likely of the two to oppose herself to it, was most discouraging. In his hurry to escape he tripped in the carpet, and overturned a chair.

'What is that?' exclaimed the widow excitedly.

'Nothing, mamma: Raymond is going away.'

'Why does he not wish me good-bye?' said Mrs. Conway in her old fretful manner. 'And yet, why should he? Why should anyone care for an old and beggared woman?'

'Indeed, Mrs. Conway, you must not talk like that,' said Raymond softly. 'There are bright days in store for you yet, I hope.'

'Bright days! for *me*? No, lad, no. I might have had them once, perhaps; but that is all over now.' She murmured something to herself that sounded like 'the night cometh, the night cometh,' and Raymond noted for the first time how old and ill she looked. 'He was fond of you, Ray, when you were a child,' she continued caressingly: 'he was always fond of children. He had a kind heart before I turned it into stone.'

Again, at an appealing look from Nelly, the young man was about to leave the room, when the widow called him back.

'Don't send Raymond away without a good-bye, Nelly, though that is all we have to give him. He is a good lad, though of an evil stock. I mind the days when I have dandled you in my arms, boy, and striven to be to you what your mother might have been had not Heaven been kinder to her. She died ere she reached your age. I was young then myself; and Arthur—that was your father, girl—he was my lover and my husband too. Do you think I turned his heart to stone, Nelly?'

'Indeed, mamma, you did not. You cannot be conscious of your own words. He was the kindest, gentlest being to the last.'

'Right, right, Nelly; so he was. Not one to leave us without a word, without a line, to die without a sign of love to those belonging to him. No, no. No, no—— But you are Ralph Pennicuick's son, lad. Well, well; I would not say a word to wound you. Do you mind if I kissed you, just once—an old woman like me—for the sake of old times when you cared to kiss me? The old times—the old times that were so short because I turned my Arthur's heart to stone!'

Raymond could bear the scene no longer, but, having affectionately embraced the poor lady and pressed Nelly's hand, fled from the house. If he had been alone with the widow his position would have been sufficiently distressing; but that her daughter should be present while she thus reproached herself for what might be almost termed the conduct of her life, was intolerable. What made it the more impressive was that this was the first occasion on which either he or Nelly had heard Mrs. Conway own herself in the least to blame as respected the estrangement between herself and her husband. She must have been moved indeed to have made such an admission; and the burst of affection with

which she had bidden good-bye to Raymond had been scarcely less surprising than her self-reproach.

In after days, when subsequent events had made that interview memorable, Raymond often pondered on it: how sad and strange that condemnation had sounded from the lips of the self-accused! how unexpected had been that outbreak of affection and remorse! It was as though the barrier that had shut in the poor woman's feelings for twenty years had given way beneath the pressure of her love, and laid bare her broken heart.

CHAPTER II.

A PICTURE SALE.

On the afternoon after Raymond's visit, Mr. and Mrs. Wardlaw presented themselves at the Cedars, to pay their first formal call on the widow since her bereavement: and, much to their astonishment, found her from home. She was wont to go abroad but seldom, even before her late misfortune, and rarely without being accompanied by her daughter; but on this occasion she had left the house, while Nelly was 'marketing' in the morning, leaving word with the little maid that she had business in London, and might not be back till late in the day. Nelly was not absolutely alarmed at her absence, but she had a sense of disquiet which made the arrival of the friendly couple a great relief to her. They endeavoured to allay her anxiety by offering a number of reasons, more or less ingenious, but all improbable, for her mother's leaving home; and though these carried no conviction with them, the very expression of their confidence that all was right, was vaguely comforting. They supplied that need of 'company' which—where the company is sympathetic—we all feel when in nervous suspense; and their conversation prevented her from dwelling upon the matter, and helped to pass the time

until her apprehensions (as she hoped) should be removed by her mother's return.

'I am come here, my dear young lady,' said Mr. Wardlaw gravely, 'upon a business errand. I want to get the advantage of you in a little bargain or two.'

'Yes,' put in Mrs. Wardlaw, 'and you must be very firm, my dear Nelly, and if possible grasping. You must not be taken in by John's apparent frankness. He has been all his life connected with commerce, and has been successful in it, and you may be quite certain therefore that he will cheat you if he can.'

To see this honest merchant laugh and roll in enjoyment of this shameful accusation—which he did not attempt to combat—was a spectacle that drew a smile from Nelly in spite of all her troubles.

'I know your husband's character well, dear Mrs. Wardlaw,' she replied, 'and believe him capable of anything; but, as Raymond used to quote from the classics when we remonstrated with him for crossing Hyde Park so late at night in the garotting times, "he who has empty pockets can afford to laugh at the foot-pad;" I have nothing about which to bargain with Mr. Wardlaw, and therefore cannot be overreached.'

'What! Have you sold all your pictures?'

'Oh, my pictures!' said Nelly, laughing; 'well, I am afraid I have still one or two on hand. But Mr. Jones, the print-seller in the High Street, has got more in his window than he can accommodate, and if you really wish—the prices are marked on them!' Here she stopped short with a little blush.

'What! you don't mean to say those beautiful views of the river, that Jones has had these three weeks, are yours?' continued Mrs. Wardlaw.

'They are my little attempts at water-colours,' said Nelly shyly; 'but I should be sorry that, out of mere good nature, Mr. Wardlaw should disfigure the walls of Coromandel House with them.'

'But I tell you they are *beautiful*,' continued Mrs. Wardlaw; 'I was saying so to John the other day; only he answered, "Stuff and nonsense! do you suppose any pictures can be worth buying at those prices?"'

'My dear young lady, don't believe her,' cried Mr. Wardlaw, turning a deep purple. 'I know a good thing when I see it, as well as any man that ever made a bid at Christie's. Said I to myself, "Those are Miss Nelly's, and she is very foolish to let Jones exhibit them at so low a figure;" but I was not going to say so, for my wife would have said, "Buy 'em," which would have depreciated your valuable works in the market, and at the same time put a commission into Jones's pocket. Now, I am come here expressly to save the commission. So let us go up to the studio, and get to business at once.'

'Well, I never!' cried Mrs. Wardlaw, holding up her hands. 'I did not believe it was in the man to tell such a tale. If you can talk like that, John—with such hypocrisy and deceit—why, how do I know that it is business takes you up to town so regular, *as you say*, and sometimes until the small hours? Oh, Nelly, Nelly, what a revelation have you been the means of making of the depravity of man!'

'Well, I didn't think your husband was such a diplomatist, I must say,' said Nelly, smiling.

'Ah! he's all that and worse,' put in Mrs. Wardlaw gravely.

'Nay, if it comes to long words, let us see the pictures,' ex-

claimed the culprit; 'there is something in canvas as seems to draw 'em out. Even a sensible man, when he gets opposite a picture, begins to talk outlandishly; it's "delicacy of tone," or "refinement of treatment," or "cheery skewero," or such like; I sometimes think it's something in the oil as draws it out, though it's almost as bad with the water-colours.'

'It is plain you are not an art-critic,' said Nelly, as she led the way to her little studio, 'and I am afraid you have not a reverent mind.'

'Yet John knows what's what,' whispered Mrs. Wardlaw, who thought perhaps that her husband had been 'run down' enough. 'He's got an eye in his head.'

Which was true enough, although he could not have put an 'h' before the latter to save his life.

'Oh, ho! so these are the shadovers are they?' observed Mr. Wardlaw, as he looked round the room, the walls of which, notwithstanding her contributions to Mr. Jones's shop, still showed some half-dozen specimens of Nelly's handiwork. 'Why, here's the "'ouse" itself. A very pretty little thing, upon my word.'

'It's lovely,' observed Mrs. Wardlaw, enthusiastically, 'and as like as like; why, there's the creeper as though it was a-growing, and the balcony with the flowers looking as if one could smell 'em, and the kitchen window looking as nat'ral ——'

'Hush! hold your tongue, silly,' interrupted her lord and master; 'that ain't the way to cheapen a picture. Why, the wall is out of drawing, miss; and the top of the house too big for the bottom; and as for the cheery skewero'—here he stepped back and made a telescope of his hand—'why, it's evident it's the work of a beginner.'

'John, for shame!' exclaimed Mrs. Wardlaw indignantly; 'I say it's all lovely.'

'Indeed, Mrs. Wardlaw, your husband is quite right,' said Nelly. 'Mamma herself pointed out that the perspective was amiss; and of course it's true that I am but a beginner.'

'Nay, I don't say I don't admire it,' observed Mr. Wardlaw in less critical tones. 'There are many points about it that I do admire. And it's like the house, or how should I have known it at the first glance? The garden, too, if it wasn't so confoundedly steep——'

'I'm afraid it's rather like a hanging garden,' put in Nelly good-humouredly.

'What, for clothes? Indeed it's not, my dear,' said Mrs. Wardlaw encouragingly. 'Nobody would mistake it for a place of that kind.'

'Well, I tell you what, Miss Nelly,' cried the merchant, 'I'll give you ten guineas for it as it stands, without the frame.'

Nelly smiled sadly, and shook her head.

'Quite right!' exclaimed Mrs. Wardlaw vehemently; 'it is worth twenty if it's worth a guinea.'

'I doubt very much, dear Mrs. Wardlaw, if it *is* worth a guinea,' observed Nelly quietly. 'I am sure your good husband bid at least five times its value. But the fact is the little sketch is not for sale.'

'She understands all about it,' said Mr. Wardlaw admiringly. 'That is exactly the right thing to say, my dear. Come, I will give you five-and-twenty guineas for it.' The honest merchant was really in earnest; he felt as though in his favourite atmosphere of the auction room, and it excited him prodigiously.

'Indeed, Mr. Wardlaw, I was quite serious,' said Nelly gravely; 'that sketch was done for my dear father, when—when we little thought that he was to be taken from us; it was painted for him as a birthday gift, at the very time; alas! that he was doomed to death, and it seems somehow, as it were, a part of him. So, you see, it can never be for sale.'

'Oh lawks!' cried Mr. Wardlaw under his breath, and wiping his face with his pocket-handkerchief. 'This is what comes of fancy prices, a thing I always set myself against on principle.'

'I am so sorry we have hurt your feelings, darling,' said Mrs. Wardlaw soothingly; then, turning sharply round upon her husband, 'How could you be such a fool, John? The very least you can do is to take all the other pictures, at dear Nelly's own estimate of their value.'

'Indeed,' laughed Nelly, through her tears, 'if Mr. Wardlaw did that, he would not ruin himself. I am conscious that they are but very poor things. Do you suppose,' she continued with deep feeling, 'that I do not know why you two are here to-day? You wish to encourage me in the calling to which I have ventured to apply myself. You want to persuade me that these indifferent productions of mine are really worth the lavish sums you are prepared to offer for them. You are not my true patrons, but something infinitely better and dearer—my true friends. I am not so blinded by self-conceit as not to know that I have everything to learn—except your kindness, which I knew beforehand.'

'I will give five hundred pounds for the lot,' murmured Mr. Wardlaw to himself; 'I must give it and she must take it.'

'But indeed, Nelly,' cried Mrs. Wardlaw, 'you are much mistaken. I really want to possess your pictures; they are far more

valuable in my eyes than the things John buys at the London sales, painted by the greatest masters. What do I care about a tall street, and a straight stream, without a tree to be seen near it——'

'She means my Canalettis,' groaned her husband; 'I've got 1,500*l.* worth of 'em—go on.'

'I say, what do I care about those hideous pictures of out-of-the-way places, by a foreigneering artist, compared with these bright sketches of scenes that I know, by a hand that I love? I protest, Nelly, that these half-dozen little pictures of yours give me a greater pleasure than all the grand collection that we have got at home. And since this is so, why shouldn't John make me a present of the whole of them? They will give me more satisfaction than any diamond ring he can buy me, and will not cost half the price.'

Upon this there commenced a Dutch auction of the works in question; Mr. Wardlaw or his wife proposing some preposterous bid, and Nelly insisting on a much smaller and more reasonable figure.

'I don't want 'em home just now, my dear Nelly,' said Mrs. Wardlaw, when the purchases had been completed; 'I must make room for 'em as I can.'

'What you are thinking of, dear Mrs. Wardlaw, is that the absence of the sketches would leave my walls bare.'

'No, no,' cried the old merchant, 'of course you keep 'em. When I buy a pictur at the Royal Academy, do you think I get it home at once: not a bit of it, it's not the custom of the trade. And when I do get it home, do you think I keep it? Certainly not. I have to loan my picture to the artist who painted it. He

says he wants it again for a few 'touches,' which means perhaps to take a copy of it for somebody else; what *he* calls a "replica"; if it was in any other line of business than the Fine Arts, *I* should call it a fraud.—Hullo, what's the matter?'

It was the little maid with a telegram, which Nelly took from her with a white face.

'It is for *you*, Mr. Wardlaw, thank heaven,' faltered she; 'they have sent it on from your house. My nerves are unstrung; and telegrams have been so fatal of late, that I almost feared some bad news about dear mamma.'

'That is not like you to be so nervous, my darling,' said Mrs. Wardlaw soothingly. 'It is but five o'clock, and it is only natural that your mother, who feels the heat so much, should defer her return till the cool of the day. Besides, she left word she might be late. If I was to be frightened by every telegram that comes to John—I hope it isn't about those tambourines, by the by.'

Mr. Wardlaw had glanced his eye over the telegram, and then crumpled it up in his pocket. He now walked to the window and looked out, so that his back was turned to the two ladies.

'Something has gone down that ought to have gone up,' whispered Mrs. Wardlaw to Nelly, 'or something has gone up that ought to have gone down. They're always doing it, bless ye.'

'I think we had better be going,' said Mr. Wardlaw, still keeping his face averted. The change from kindly banter to gravity in his tone was very marked.

'You can go, of course, John, but I shall stay with Nelly till her mamma comes back. I am sure she will be glad of company.'

'Very good,' said Mr. Wardlaw slowly. 'Can I have a word with my wife, Nelly, before I go?'

'Then it *is* the tambourines,' murmured Mrs. Wardlaw; 'he has found out he has but one gross instead of two.' Nelly had passed into the next room, and closed the door, leaving her visitors alone together.

'Oh wife, wife! this is a dreadful business,' said Mr. Wardlaw hoarsely. 'That poor girl yonder is an orphan.'

'Good heavens, what do you mean, John? I know of course that she has lost her father.'

'And her mother too. This message comes from Raymond Pennicuick. "*Mrs. Conway has fallen down dead in a fit of apoplexy while at my father's rooms in the Albany. Your wife will go to Nelly at once, I know.*"'

CHAPTER III.

FACE TO FACE.

NELLY never knew that it was owing to her own words that her mother had undertaken that visit to London which had ended so disastrously. After Raymond's departure on the preceding day, and when Mrs. Conway had somewhat recovered from her passionate despair, she had pressed her daughter for every detail of his conversation. 'Was she sure,' she asked, 'that he was himself convinced from his father's manner that the dead man had left no word of farewell: or was he only dutifully repeating Mr. Pennicuick's words without faith in their veracity?'

'I think Raymond believes, mamma, that there was no especial message from dear papa.'

'And *you*,' put in her mother quickly, 'what do *you* think?'

'I don't know what to think,' answered Nelly sadly; 'it was very unlike dear papa; he was not accustomed to use vague terms in expressing his affection; and as a dying man, he would, one would imagine, have sent some particular message.'

'You think he would have forgiven your mother?' said Mrs. Conway slowly.

'Oh, indeed, dear mamma, I was not thinking of that; at such an awful time, it is probable that his mind never dwelt on

the unhappy estrangement between you. He must have wished to die in love and peace with all, and above all with you.'

'That is what I am trying to believe, Nelly. The shortest time, it is said, is sufficient for man to reconcile himself with his Maker. I read a verse once over some one's grave :—

> Between the stirrup and the ground
> Mercy I sought, mercy I found ;

and surely even a less time should suffice for reconciliation between man and wife.'

'It should indeed, dear mother, and no doubt it was so. What I am most surprised at in poor papa's silence is that he should have said nothing of the circumstances that led to his cruel punishment; I should have thought he would have commissioned Mr. Pennicuick to explain them ; to my mind they need explanation.'

'And to mine,' answered Mrs. Conway hoarsely.

'It was so contrary to dear papa's character,' continued Nelly, preferring to dwell even on so sad a topic rather than on the more distressing one of the alienation between her parents, 'to commit any outrage upon people's feelings, let them be who they might; not to mention the risk he must have been conscious of incurring; and he was not one to run foolish risks.'

'Not of that sort,' answered her mother thoughtfully. 'Your good sense goes all the way with my own convictions. Ralph Pennicuick is lying to us—that is certain. He has some selfish reason, some wicked motive, for keeping us in the dark.'

'Nay, nay, dear mamma, I can no longer follow you,' remonstrated Nelly. 'What possible motive can Mr. Pennicuick have in depriving us of the melancholy satisfaction of hearing the last of my poor father? Because we are miserable, we have no right

to discard both reason and charity. Indeed you are doing Mr. Pennicuick wrong.'

'You are speaking to one who knows him,' said her mother bitterly, and with a preoccupied air. Her head, heavy with thought, was leaning on her hand; she looked like one without a future, and whose weary brain, o'erladen with vain regrets, searches the past in vain for one bright spot whereon to linger.

'Nay, since you are so very hard upon Mr. Pennicuick, mamma, I must tell you something to his credit. He has made a certain offer—you will probably refuse it—but it is due to him that it should not be rejected ungraciously.'

'An offer? What sort of an offer? Has it anything to do with Raymond?'

'Nothing at all, mamma,' answered the girl firmly, though the red rose in her cheek. 'It is a proposition entirely of his own, and I must say a generous one.'

'Generous? and from Ralph Pennicuick? that is impossible! We have good authority for believing that grapes do not grow on thorns, nor figs on thistles.'

'Indeed, mamma, if I may say so, the same authority has taught us to impute no evil—and especially where only good can be intended. Mr. Pennicuick has offered—and I must add in a very delicate way—to allow us three hundred pounds a year.'

'What!' Mrs. Conway rose from her chair with a quickness of which her stout frame would have seemed incapable, and stared incredulously in her daughter's face.

'There was only one stipulation, mamma,' continued Nelly; 'that there should be "no thanks."'

'That means that he does not wish to see us,' said Mrs. Conway.

'So much we already know, dear mother; and indeed, if he is ill, as Raymond tells us, that is intelligible enough. The offer, however, is certainly a genuine one and must be suitably acknowledged. I am sorry I spoke of it just at present, but you seemed anxious that I should tell you all that passed.'

'Quite right, quite right, Nelly—and now let us talk of something else.'

There was very little talk, however, between them; Mrs. Conway's manner was thoughtful and abstracted, and she retired earlier than was her wont, on the plea of fatigue. She had not quitted her room the next morning when Nelly went into the town, and her surprise was great indeed on her return to find that her mother had left the house for London.

That livelong night no sleep had visited Mrs. Conway's pillow. She did not even attempt to sleep. It was only a portion of her life, so far as her mere existence was concerned. Her thoughts, her heart, her soul were fixed upon the Past; and not even upon her own Past. The question that presented itself again and again to her was, What had happened to her husband?

The offer of the allowance from Ralph Pennicuick had reawakened all her suspicions, all her fears—though without rekindling a single hope. What could have induced a man so mean—except where his own pleasures or vices were concerned—to have made such a proposal? That it was no tenderness for the memory of his friend, she felt well assured. It must be some miserable attempt at compensation—at neutralisation of the stings of conscience. The ghost of her dead husband seemed to stand beside her, whispering, 'Foul play, foul play.' Even the morning light had no power to exorcise it. The question that had im-

portuned her when she lay down in her bed was reiterated still when she arose from it, 'What did in truth happen to my husband?' There was only one man in England—and as she imagined in the world—who could answer it for her; and that man was Ralph Pennicuick. To him therefore she resolved to go.

Mrs. Conway, though she had so long been poor, was unaccustomed to the independent ways which are common among persons of scanty income. She was not used to travel, nor of late years to go indeed anywhere, alone. Even the short railway journey to Waterloo Station would under ordinary circumstances have been quite an ordeal to her, and it flurried her now notwithstanding the importance of the matter that occupied her thoughts. Then there was the cab from Waterloo to 'the Albany,' and when she got there the doubt as to how to enter that mysterious, though fashionable, establishment. All these things agitated the poor lady, as small things agitate the rest of us when we are ill and weak and helpless, and rendered her especially unfit for the interview on which she had set her mind.

A more unfit antagonist to deal with 'Steel' Pennicuick upon a matter in which it was necessary that he should hold his own, could hardly be imagined. The widow, however, was not afraid of him. She was too full of suspicion and anger to feel fear. Dame Partlet, the hen, who has lost her mate and has suspicion that Reynard knows what has become of him, will flutter up against his sharp nose and glittering teeth with reckless importunity.

The Albany porter was rather puzzled by Mrs. Conway's appearance. He had general directions about the admission of the female sex, none of which seemed quite to apply to her particular case. She was neither young nor pretty; she did not look like a dun,

though, on the other hand, he was not sure that she was a lady; however, Mr. Pennicuick had a janitor of his own, and he left him to decide upon the advisability of admitting her to his master's presence.

'Letter X, mum, first floor,' was all he thought it necessary to say to her.

On arriving at Letter X, Mrs. Conway, had she been acquainted with the usages of the place, would have gone away and deferred her errand for a better opportunity, for the outer door was closed; but, not being aware that this meant 'not at home,' she used the knocker sharply, which at once produced Mr. Hatton.

'Mr. Pennicuick is not at home, Mrs. Conway,' said he blandly.

'That is not true,' said she (for the porter had told her otherwise), 'and I mean to see him.'

If this audacious visitor had been quite outside the 'oak,' perhaps the valet would have ventured to close it, even in her face; but she had already crossed the threshold, and he could hardly push the poor lady out.

'Please to wait here, madam, one moment.'

It was his loyal intention to give his master the chance of flying to his bedroom, from whence escape was possible by another door, for he was a fox whose earth had more than one outlet; but the widow was too quick for him. Ere he could give his warning, Ralph Pennicuick caught sight of the woman's face which of all others he most feared to see glowering behind his valet's shoulder.

'Dear Mrs. Conway, this is most unexpected. Hatton, you may leave us,' added he quickly; for there was that in his visitor's eye which presaged a stormy scene, and a scene before a servant is unendurable.

He held out his hand, but the widow waved it away with an impatient gesture, nor would she even take the chair which he pushed forward for her accommodation; she stood with one shaking hand upon the back of it, and the other pointing at him, while her white lips strove to articulate in vain.

'You are angry with me, I perceive, Mrs. Conway,' said Pennicuick in conciliatory tones, 'though I have knowingly done nothing to arouse your anger. If it seems strange that I have not visited you, mere physical inability to do so must be my excuse. I sent my son to explain to you——'

'Ralph Pennicuick,' interrupted Mrs. Conway hoarsely, 'I am come here to know the truth.'

'The truth, my dear madam?'

'Yes, the truth about my husband.'

Pennicuick's swarthy face, pale with fear and hate and care, quailed before her searching glance, but he answered calmly enough:

'What Raymond has told you he heard from my own lips. I can only repeat——'

'That is why I disbelieve it,' broke in the other vehemently. 'It is your lips that I mistrust, because they are used to lying. Did they not lie to *him* when he was alive? What, do you suppose I have forgotten when your Raymond was but a few months old, and I a second mother to him, and my husband your best friend, how you set all those sacred ties at naught, and dared to offer me your love?'

'That was a long time ago, my dear madam,' answered Pennicuick, with a harsh laugh.

'It was so, but I have not forgotten it. The nature of the man

who could so outrage friendship and the memory of the dead has never altered; now as then, there is no sacrifice of others—even of your own son—which you would hesitate to make, to gratify one selfish pleasure.'

'You are severe, madam; I admit that you were a very dragon of virtue, and I—well, anything you please—but there is a statute of limitations for offences committed a lifetime ago, and as in this case nothing came of it——'

'That is false! Everything came of it. It cost me my husband's love.'

'You never told him?'

'No, or you would not have been alive to ask the question, but the horror (the cause of which I might not tell) with which I saw his friendship for you, bred quarrels between us, and, thanks to you, the breach grew so wide that love could not recross it. It was you that separated us and you that kept us asunder.'

'Indeed, madam, you overrate my influence. Of course I was not pleased at the contempt—merited, I will confess—with which you treated my devotion; but as to your domestic differences, I think they can be otherwise accounted for.'

'I was to blame,' said Mrs. Conway gravely; 'I was much to blame; though, if you had not come between us, matters would not have been so bad. I was hard and bitter and cold; though Heaven knows that through it all I loved him. I read your sneer, "You hid it well, madam," but it is true, and you shall find it so. If I proved it not while he lived, I will prove it now. If he never knew it in this world, he shall know it in heaven, if spirits have any cognisance of things on earth. I will devote myself henceforth to redress his wrongs.'

'Your grief has weakened your judgment, Mrs. Conway,' observed Ralph Pennicuick quietly. 'That your husband has met with a most cruel fate is true—so cruel, that, to spare you, I have sealed my lips concerning it.'

'I spoke of wrongs,' broke in the other harshly; 'falsehood, where we have a right to look for truth; treachery, where loyalty should be; betrayal of trust—ah, you have betrayed him!'

Her words, swift as lightning, seemed to blast their object; Ralph Pennicuick literally shrank before them and grew deadly pale, though he still faced the speaker with his eyes, the expression of which was firm and venomous.

'Who says I have betrayed him?' inquired he hoarsely.

'Your face,' answered she quietly, 'which speaks truth, and gives the lie to your tongue. I was sure it was so all along, but now I am doubly sure.'

Her passion was frightful to witness; her large frame trembled and quivered; her face was purple; her eyes, always prominent, seemed to leap at him from their sockets.

'Do you suppose,' she went on, 'that I was deceived by your lying telegram? that I did not know Arthur Conway better than to believe him capable of the offence you imputed to him? He was not one to defile temples and break down images: or to risk, for a mere whim, a life that was precious to another. You alone, Ralph Pennicuick, were with him; you alone know how and why he met his death.'

'You know all that I know, madam,' answered Pennicuick sullenly. 'I was in Shanghae, doing my best to save him, when he perished. The matter does not rest upon my testimony: two English officers accompanied me to the scene of his execution.'

'Is that the way an innocent man defends himself?' cried Mrs. Conway. '"If you don't believe me, there are two others—credible witnesses." Every word you speak is a confession of your guilt.'

'I do not understand you, madam,' said Pennicuick.

'Then I will speak plainer. I see there has been foul play. I suspect the worst of you. He never committed the offence for which he suffered. It was *you* who committed it. What, what! have I found you out? Murderer, murderer!' She threw up her hands and fell forward on the floor with a heavy thud.

Pennicuick did not move; it seemed as though her last words had turned him into stone; he stood and stared at the prostrate woman without an effort to assist her, without an attempt to summon others to her assistance, though he was dimly aware of the presence of Hatton on the other side of the door.

Mrs. Conway's voice had been raised loud enough to summon him from a much greater distance than the servants' room he occupied, and most persons would have answered a cry which must have sounded very like 'Murder!' but Mr. Hatton's characteristic was discretion.

At last, seeing that his visitor still lay without motion at his feet, Ralph Pennicuick, moved by a new terror, pulled the bell-rope furiously, which at once summoned the valet.

'Something has happened to Mrs. Conway; an apoplectic fit as I should imagine; send the porter for Dr. Green, and return to me immediately.'

His mind had recovered from the rude shock of Mrs. Conway's vehement accusation, and was getting into its usual excellent working order. At the same time he felt like one in front of a battery that has 'got the range,' and whose only hope lies in its ammunition

being exhausted. If Mrs. Conway had drawn her last breath he would be safe, but otherwise the rancour of her tongue would pursue him everywhere. The shaft she had shot at a venture appeared to him to have had a definite aim; for though, in her hate and rage, her suspicions had far outstripped the truth, there had been moments when he had actually accused himself of his friend's death, and the word 'murderer' had scarcely seemed misplaced to him. It was no time for such morbid and remorseful feelings now; it behoved him to stand upon his guard against a charge, less serious indeed, but by no means fanciful or groundless. This woman, lying dead or alive before him, had seized the very weapon used by his conscience, the barb of which he was ever striving to pluck out from his own bosom. She had called him Betrayer of Trust; it was true there was no proof of that, nor ever would be; but the knowledge that another person beside himself had become possessed of this fact—though it was only by intuition—would be intolerable.

To know oneself to be a scoundrel is one of the bitterest fruits of the tree of knowledge, yet not so bitter as to know another knows it, and 'another' in this case Ralph Pennicuick felt but too sure meant all who had a right to know it. Reckless of consequences, as deaf to menace as to reason, this woman would proclaim his infamy upon the housetops, and as confidently as though she possessed the proofs of it, as long as she lived. But would she live even to repeat her accusation once? He leant over the prostrate body and regarded it attentively, taking care, however, not to disturb a limb. He foresaw that, if matters were as he hoped, there must be an inquest; and though to no mortal eye could he seem to have any interest in the woman's death, yet it was well

to be on the safe side. It struck him that it might have been better perhaps, if it were apoplexy, to raise her head, but he let it lie (the purple face staring upwards with apathetic eyes); not that he wished to kill her (though he wished her dead), but simply that none should say he had had any hand in the matter.

She lay quite still, nor, so far from the stertorous breathing that he had understood took place under such circumstances, could he discern she breathed at all. It was indeed a sorry sight, and had he been quite sure that all was over, it might have aroused his pity. The contrast between what lay before him and the recollection of what she had been years ago, when he had thought it worth while to have run risks to win her, might in that case have struck him; but, as it was, the desire of self-preservation overpowered all other feelings and obliterated them. He kept his place, like a sentinel on guard, till his valet reappeared. 'This is a sad business, Hatton,' said he. 'I am afraid of doing anything till the doctor comes for fear it should do more harm than good.'

'That is the safest plan, sir. I noticed the poor lady was very excited when I let her in—or rather, when she let herself in—for she would take no denial.'

'It was natural that she should wish to see me,' answered the other quietly.

Then master and man both stood on guard—revolving their own thoughts—till the doctor came, who, stooping down, busied himself for a few seconds with his lancet, and then rose, shaking his head in the manner with which we are most of us, alas! acquainted, and which thus appeared in the reports of certain subse-

quent proceedings, 'Dr. Green at once pronounced life to be extinct.'

This gentleman was an eminent physician living hard by in Piccadilly, and professionally known to Mr. Pennicuick.

'How did this sad business come about?' inquired he.

'It was from intense excitement I believe, doctor. It is Mrs. Conway, wife of the poor fellow who was killed when travelling with me in China, and she came here insisting upon having the whole particulars. I had avoided her for that very reason—for they were of a nature to shock any woman; but she compelled me to be explicit, and this, alas! is the result.'

'I am not surprised at it,' answered the doctor gravely. 'There was a strong predisposition to apoplexy, no doubt, and any sudden shock, especially if she was excited, must have been dangerous to her.'

'She was intensely excited,' reiterated Pennicuick; 'Hatton there remarked it even before she entered the room. When I spoke of what had happened to her husband, she cried out, speaking of the Chinese who had put him so barbarously to death, "Murderers! murderers!" and then fell down upon the floor just as you found her.'

'I heard the lady cry out them very words,' put in Hatton respectfully.

'The whole affair is clear as daylight,' observed Dr. Green; 'but it will be necessary to inform the coroner. I am very sorry to inconvenience you,' he added, seeing the clouds gather on Pennicuick's face, 'but an inquest is indispensable.'

'Do not speak of inconvenience, doctor. I will go to some hotel for the present—perhaps Hatchett's'

'There is no reason why the poor lady should not be taken home.'

'There is only a daughter left; the shock would be too terrible. No, she had better remain here. Let everything be done, Hatton, that should be done.'

'And about Miss Conway, sir? should not Mr. Raymond be communicated with?'

'Why?' The question was short and sharp; but immediately his voice altered to a gentler tone. 'Yes, you are right; I will go to him myself, and he will arrange matters, at least if I can be spared,' continued he, looking inquiringly at the doctor.

'You can be of no sort of use here,' answered that gentleman. 'If you take my advice, you will at once remove to Hatchett's. Town is very full, and the sooner you secure rooms—and especially the sooner you leave *these* rooms—the better.'

Ralph Pennicuick took the hint and his hat, and left at once.

'Your master is not looking well,' said the doctor to the valet.

He is far from well, sir; he has been very nervous and out of sorts ever since he came home from China. Captain Conway's death has shaken him a great deal, I think.'

'Ah! And this is not a nice sort of thing to happen to a man in his state. You must stay here, and I will send some people to look after matters.'

Mr. Hatton did not care to stay by himself where he was, but followed the doctor out, and remained outside the door of the apartment until the 'people' alluded to arrived. The whole occurrence was distasteful to him; he had not contemplated being asked to remain with corpses when he entered upon his situation;

but, on the other hand, he felt that the bond between himself and his master had been somehow strengthened by this unpleasant event. He was conscious that he had been discreet, and that his discretion had not escaped Ralph Pennicuick's observation. Very few things that concerned that gentleman did.

CHAPTER IV.

ORPHANED.

THOUGH poor Nelly's home was left desolate on that terrible day, it was not deserted. Mrs. Wardlaw left her home and the husband from whom she had never been separated for a quarter of a century, to take up her quarters for the night with the orphaned girl.

'You have got a mother yet, my darling,' she whispered fondly in her ear, 'if you would only let it be so.'

But for the time Nelly was hardly sensible of her kindness. She had lost father, mother, and all that belonged to her, and seemed to herself utterly alone in the world. If Raymond had been her accepted lover, and could have come down in person to give his loving sympathy, it would just then have hardly availed her, though the consciousness that he was hers would without doubt have been an unspeakable comfort; but, as it was, it was forbidden her even to think of him. There was no green spot in all the desert of Life that lay before her on which to fix her eyes. She was unhappy before, and full of apprehension for the future, but far worse had befallen her than she had dreamed of. 'I was not in safety, neither was I quiet, yet trouble came,' were the words of Scripture that seemed to her to have the most proper

application to herself; its promises and recommendations to be of good cheer, were not for her. Even the excellent woman who had come to sustain her in her tribulation failed in her errand of mercy. There was no faculty of consolation in her; for sympathy —except so far as pity and kindliness went—was wanting. She had never so much as seen Captain Conway, and only knew of him as a man who had been estranged from his family, partly by his own act; it was impossible for her to understand the bond that, stretching across the globe, had united father and daughter of late years so nearly. Her knowledge of Mrs. Conway had been more personal, but it had only made her acquainted with the poor woman's faults and follies; and Nelly could not but be aware of this. She had herself been acquainted with them, but also with the love and tenderness that lay at the root of her mother's character, and which were hidden from Mrs. Wardlaw as from the rest of the world, and she resented the fact that this kind friend had been, although by necessity, thus ignorant of her mother's virtues. How could she understand the greatness of her sorrow, who did not understand the greatness of her loss? Nelly was very sensible, however, of her good intentions, nor did her common sense so far desert her in her wretchedness as to cause her to fail to recognise the rarity as well as the value of such a friendship. Words of gratitude, steeped in tears, were not wanting to her, and she did also what she could in the shape of acknowledgment by giving way to her friend's wishes in various material particulars. If she had had her own way, she would have gone up to town at once, and kept companionship with all that remained of her poor mother till it was committed to the grave; but she suffered herself to be overruled in this particular.

'You surely believe me, Nelly,' Mrs. Wardlaw had reasoned, 'when I say that your dear mother is dead, and can derive no possible solace from your presence.'

'I know you got the telegram—but,' added she with sad significance, 'one cannot always believe telegrams.'

'My darling, Raymond has been,' returned the other softly. 'He followed his message to our house in person; only he told my husband not to tell you unless you inquired; he is not one of those to parade his kindness, and, besides, it really seems as though——'

'I understand,' put in Nelly gravely. 'What did he tell Mr. Wardlaw? Let me know all.'

'Well, darling, he told him enough to make me sure that it would only shock you to—to do what you propose. It is better to remember your poor mother as you saw her last.'

There was a long pause, during which Nelly shed those tears whose silent flow is deeper and more sad than the wildest bursts of grief.

'Raymond saw her, darling, and everything—the little that now can be done—has been done, just as though you had been there yourself. It may be necessary, but he hopes not, that you should be at the inquest.' Here Nelly had been unable to repress a shudder. 'There must be one, it seems, though Dr. Green, who saw your poor mother within a few minutes of her seizure, pronounced it, for certain, apoplexy.'

'Where—where is she?'

'At the Albany, at Mr. Pennicuick's chambers. That is what makes it so impossible that you should go, even if there were not other reasons. He has gone himself to some hotel; but the place

will be given up to the officials—the jury and that—and afterwards she will be brought to Richmond. John will make arrangements. Pray be reasonable, darling.'

So Nelly consented, and never saw her dead mother's face—just as it had happened with her in the case of her father. There is much painfulness in such farewells, but also a melancholy satisfaction, and to forego it, was, in Nelly's case, an act of self-denial. It is a test (though a rough one, and by no means without exceptions) of the genuineness of our love, when we wish to take such sad leave-takings in person, and not to have our dead put out of sight—and, too often, out of mind—as quickly as may be.

On another point, also, Nelly felt herself constrained to give way to her good friend's arguments. If her own ideas had been consulted, she would have preferred to dwell alone in her present habitation, at all events for a little, albeit her bereavement had robbed it of all the attributes of home. But Mrs. Wardlaw had put it to her John, that it would never do to let the dear girl 'eat her heart out with thinking of them as she had lost' in that death-stricken abode, and she contrived to rescue her from that fate by help of arguments borrowed from the Proprieties.

'I care nothing for what people think of my staying here alone,' Nelly had said, not audaciously, but from that callous indifference to the opinion of 'people' which always accompanies genuine woe.

'But your poor dear mother would have cared for it *for* you, Nelly, under such circumstances. I am sure, if she can look down from heaven and see you now, she would say, "Make Coromandel House your home, my darling, until you find yourself better suited

A remark the sublunary tone of which could only be attributed to the very recent arrival of its supposed utterer in the Celestial Regions; but Nelly understood what was meant, and, urged also by the wish to gratify her friend, was moved to take up for the present her quarters with the Wardlaws.

There, in seclusion of course from all save her host and hostess, and with a sense of loneliness and isolation beyond the power of words to tell, she remained for some time, save for a few hours of painful publicity. It was found necessary, after all, that she should give evidence at the inquest. She pleaded against it as some half-blinded creature might have implored not to be dragged into the glare of noon, but declined to take advantage of a doctor's certificate to excuse herself. It could easily and with propriety have been obtained, for she was very far from well; but she had been given to understand that to absent herself would be to evade a public duty. This information she had received, strange to say, in a note from Mr. Pennicuick, marked 'Private and confidential,' the contents of which she had therefore kept to herself; but there is no reason why my readers should exercise a similar delicacy.

My dear Miss Conway,—In spite of my utmost efforts to save you from attending the sad formality that must needs take place on Wednesday, it seems your presence can hardly be dispensed with. To learn that any act is a duty is, I know, in your case, to secure its performance: but over and above that consideration I think there is a peculiar propriety in your making this sacrifice. You and I are well aware that it was your mother's excessive sensitiveness and sorrow for your father's loss, acting upon a system already debilitated and little fitted to sustain so terrible a shock, that has been the cause of her decease; but it is just possible that some question may be put embarrassing to a mere friend (however devoted) like myself, but easily answered, and with much greater weight of authority, by yourself. Your poor mother's prejudices were strong—she was easily angered and somewhat difficult to conciliate—but we know how loyal and loving was her heart. It seems to me that no hint of

what was after all a constitutional weakness should be allowed to leak out in a mere formal inquiry such as this, and your presence would prevent it, or nip it in the bud. I hope I have made my meaning clear: but at all events I am quite certain, my dear Miss Conway, you will not misunderstand my motives. For the present I write nothing more, for I feel the subject of my note is too grave and sad to admit of the companionship of another topic.

Your very sincere friend,

RALPH PENNICUICK.

Mr. Pennicuick's meaning was quite clear to Nelly, and she understood even his motives better than he imagined. She did not dislike him as Mrs. Conway had done, but she could not give him credit for unselfishness. That paragraph about her mother's 'prejudices' had reference, she was persuaded, to the feelings she had entertained towards himself; and the 'hint' of which he spoke in all probability was an allusion to the enmity between them. She was, however, as anxious as himself that no record of weakness should sully her mother's memory; and moreover it appeared her duty that she should do his bidding, and so she wrote him a few words of acquiescence. It did not seem strange to her, under the circumstances, that he had not, as usual, made Raymond his messenger, but other facts corroborated her view of the object of his communication. Perhaps, if she had been less nearly interested in its proceedings, the inquest would have been an ordeal even more severe than it proved to be. As it was, her thoughts were too much wrapped up in the Dead to admit of her being disturbed by minor matters, and moreover she was spared as much as possible in consideration of her position.

One juryman, indeed—there is always one such individual among the twelve—did put some searching questions to her as respected Mr. Pennicuick, which arose from the circumstance that

the notion had found its way into his head that that gentleman had murdered the deceased.

'Were Mr. Pennicuick and your mamma upon good terms,' he had inquired, 'at the time when she called at the Albany?'

'They had not met for nearly a year, in consequence of Mr. Pennicuick's absence abroad,' she had replied; 'but he was my father's most intimate friend, and had just made a proposition through a third person, which testified to his good feeling towards her.'

'Your mamma had no pecuniary claim upon him of any kind?' persisted the juror.

'None whatever,' answered Nelly emphatically, and not without a sense of recognition, in her very emphasis, of the generosity of the offer she had in her mind.

'I think there is no need to pursue our inquiries in that direction,' the coroner had observed, and so the matter had dropped. She was unaware at the time that Mr. Pennicuick himself had already suffered from that hostile and suspicious juror, though she guessed something of it from what she read in subsequent reports of the proceedings. Mr. Pennicuick had schemed in vain to get Nelly examined first, and, failing in that, had given his own evidence with characteristic clearness: perhaps the juror had thought him too clear, and at once built up an hypothesis of murder, and then clung to his hobbyhorse, in a manner which, if it could be practised with real horses, would ensure a man's never being thrown.

'You say the object of the deceased's visit to your chambers, Mr. Pennicuick, was to receive from you an account of her late husband's death. Why had you withheld this from her?'

'I had not withheld it; I had communicated the particulars

to her through my son Raymond, but it seems she wished to have them from my own lips.'

'She was not satisfied, then, with your version of the matter?'

'On the contrary, she desired to have my version without those alterations which, I suppose, belong to every narrative when it passes through fresh hands.'

'Your interview, however, seems to have been a somewhat stormy one?'

'It was so; through the natural excitement with which Mrs. Conway received the recital of her husband's fate, and of the atrocities that were committed upon him.'

'You had no sort of advantage to derive, of course, from the death of the deceased lady?'

'Advantage! Good heavens, no! What benefit could it have been to me?'

This was a little indiscreet. The Scriptural precept of confining our remarks to 'Yea, yea,' and 'Nay, nay,' has its best exemplification in the witness-box. Whatever goes beyond this, contains the element of danger. The reply 'Certainly not' would have satisfied the juror; but, as it was, an opportunity was afforded him of pursuing his investigations.

'Well, it would have been a benefit to you if she was an annuitant upon your estate, for example; we are to understand, however, that she had no sort of claim upon you?'

Ralph Pennicuick hesitated. If the question could have been foreseen, he would have replied to it with the promptest brevity, but he had only made provision against inquiries respecting his social relations with Mrs. Conway: he had not thought it possible that allusion would be made to pecuniary matters between them,

and for the moment it fairly staggered him. The claim about which he was thus interrogated had been for weeks the chief topic of his waking thoughts, as of his feverish dreams, but that only made this sudden reference to it from so unexpected a quarter the more startling. It was as a blow on an open wound. He knew that he was changing colour, and was even conscious of a faint trembling in his limbs, as he replied at last, and not before his silence had excited curiosity:

'Mrs. Conway had no sort of claim upon me whatever.'

The answer was decisive enough; yet, as we have seen, Nelly was called upon to corroborate it.

The circumstance made but little impression upon her at the time; her heart was too full for that; and the sad ceremony at Richmond, which immediately succeeded the official proceedings, helped to blot it from her remembrance. Raymond of course attended the funeral, but she was only dimly conscious of the fact. Through the darkness of that day she felt rather than saw certain gleams of light. Her host and hostess were standing by her, and would stand by her, she knew, in other trials to come; and there was another presence equally faithful and more tender, but studiously undemonstrative and unpresuming, and which she knew it behoved her not to recognise at such a time, even though all her nature yearned for sympathy and her heart was weary within her. She could not trust herself even to press Raymond's hand. As to his father, she was not even aware, until afterwards informed of the fact, that he had not been present at the funeral.

CHAPTER V.

A JESUITICAL LETTER.

If Nelly was indifferent as regarded Ralph Pennicuick and his actions, such was by no means the case with him as respected her. It would have astonished her not a little if she could have known the space which she occupied in his thoughts. While her mother had been alive, the two women had been burden enough upon his mind of late; but strange to say, now one had been removed by death, the survivor weighed upon him even more heavily than the two had done. His animosity towards Mrs. Conway—though he would never have confessed as much even to himself—had greatly mitigated his remorse for the wrong that he had done them. It is a feeling from which no human being, perhaps, is utterly free. The religious persecutor, who burnt women and children alive for the glory of God, could never have done the devil's work in that way so gaily, if he had not entertained a private grudge against them as being heretics. Our notions of Right and Wrong, so far as dealing with our fellow-creatures is concerned, are largely guided by our sense of Like and Dislike. It is even more easy to love our enemies than to behave with perfect fairness towards those who, without being our enemies, are what is termed antipathetic.

Fairness of course did not enter into Pennicuick's thoughts;

he had made up his mind to fraud from the beginning; but that course had, without doubt, been rendered less difficult to him from the sentiments he had entertained towards Mrs. Conway. He had been of old attracted by her beauty, and she had treated his attentions, as soon as they became intelligible, with indignant scorn; and from that moment his heart had hardened against her. It made no difference to him that she had not told her husband of his traitorous behaviour; to do him justice, he was no coward, and besides he was perfectly aware that she had not spared him for his own sake. For some women it would have been a perilous thing to possess such a secret, and yet to keep on tolerable terms, so far as appearances went, with their tempter. But Mrs. Conway's character was much too pronounced, and her tone of mind altogether too robust, to be open to this danger. And this, strange to say, Pennicuick at once understood, though his false notions of female honour had allowed him to make so grave a mistake in the first instance. Moreover, it was not in her nature to play the hypocrite, and notwithstanding the apprehensions she entertained of her husband's guessing the truth of the matter—a totally groundless fear, by the way, for he was the most unsuspicious of men—her behaviour towards his friend had changed from that hour, and, though it hinted nothing of the hatred with which she regarded him, became austere and chilling. This was the only way the poor woman had of declaring war; she could not appeal to her natural ally her husband; whereas, her enemy did appeal to him; drew him from his allegiance to her, or helped to draw, by widening every little breach between them caused by her unhappy temper; encouraged him in all those paths, to which he was

already too prone, that led him away from home; and in the end no doubt contributed to their separation.

Ralph Pennicuick knew that he had done this, but had never felt a pang of remorse in consequence. In his eyes, Mrs. Conway was an ill-conditioned waspish woman, and he sincerely pitied his friend for having married her. The best thing Conway could do, in his opinion, since he had been fool enough to tie such a stone round his neck, was to give her as much line as possible; the rope could not be cut, but it could be elongated. He had advised him to go abroad 'out of reach of Madam's tongue,' but not more strongly (so he flattered himself) than he would have urged the same course on any other man in the like position. But his heart, in truth, had been set hard against her. He never thought of her more directly as respected himself than as a cold-blooded prude, but her contempt for him inspired his actions. The recollection of all this, and the knowledge of her animosity towards him, heightened as it had been by intermediate events, had without doubt gone far to quiet his conscience in his falsehood to his friend—which was after all only a different sort of falsehood (with fraud added) from that which he had originally contemplated—but the love of money had been at the root of the matter; and it remained there still. He did not like Mrs. Conway a bit better because she was dead. He was quite above that weakness which softens some of us towards those with whom we have not 'got on' when they are removed by death; indeed, in this case, his foe had died in a manner studiously devised, as it seemed, for his discomfort. But now that she was gone, he felt that one of his chief springs of evil action was removed; that a flange, as it were, that had helped to keep him on the line of wrong, had given way; and though he must

still go on, that it would now be more difficult for him to do so. For Nelly Conway had given him no cause of offence whatever. He even knew (for he knew everything that concerned himself) that the girl had done her best to mitigate her mother's antipathy towards him, and though the thought of robbing the widow and the orphan had been made almost tolerable to him, now that the question narrowed itself to the orphan alone, the idea of injuring the harmless, helpless girl, the only child of the man that had died for him, was well-nigh insupportable.

But between shrinking from wronging her and rising to the height of righting her at a cost of 20,000*l.* there was a great gulf. Having once reconciled himself to keeping that sum of money to himself, he was not the man to begin arguing so delicate a question of conscience all over again. It had cost him a good deal—all his peace of mind, and half his powers of digestion—to establish the matter to his satisfaction, or partly to his satisfaction, and he was not going to be disturbed by casuistry. Only he did desire, now, much more even than before, to feel less like a villain. Although never liberal in his dealings, he had been a scrupulously honest man all his life, until this great temptation to do evil without risk had been too much for him. No amount, or scarcely any amount, of gain could have induced him to rob another man; for in this case he did not feel that he was doing this; he was only keeping money which, though he had agreed to part with it, had never left his hands, and therefore seemed somehow still to be his own. And it was really so much better, taking the matter all round, that he *should* keep it. What would a girl like Nelly Conway, for example, who had been brought up in a homely and quiet way, do with 20,000*l.*? It would be the ruin of the sin-

plicity of her character, and would mark her as a prey for every fortune-hunter. As to her father's dying wish that it should be so, the case was a precisely parallel one to that of the 'pious founders' of old, who, with the intention of doing good, did from their bequests a great deal of harm instead, and whose *post-mortem* arrangements were therefore very properly set aside by Act of Parliament in favour of some more useful plan. In spite of his determination not to reopen the question, Ralph Pennicuick in fact found himself going over again all the old round of self-extenuation and self-apology, except of course that there was now only Nelly on whom to fix his thoughts.

Raymond had not as yet spoken a word to him about her, but he had an uneasy consciousness that the boy would speak, and it would be therefore well to take precautions. As to making her an heiress at his own expense, and then permitting his son to marry her, the idea was almost as distasteful to him as that of simple restitution. Ralph Pennicuick not only loved money, but power; especially power over his own flesh and blood: and perhaps in no case—though he had always enjoined on him the propriety of 'marrying money'—would he have been pleased to see his son independent of himself. He had great confidence in the sense of future advantage, of benefits to come, and very little in the force of natural affection, and he deemed the best way to keep a son under one's thumb was to keep a tight hand on him *with something in it*. In this, as we know, he utterly misjudged Raymond's character, but such mistakes are the penalty always paid by egotists, however sagacious. To them the world is peopled by Frankensteins of their own creation, who are necessarily wanting in the attributes which they do not themselves possess.

On the very day of the funeral of Mrs. Conway, Ralph Pennicuick returned to his own rooms in the Albany, and sat down to compose a letter to Nelly. He chose that time, not only because it was the earliest date on which the thing could with propriety be done, and the sooner it was done and off his mind the better, but also because he was safe from interruption from Raymond. The lad had been as usual very dutiful, and was always looking in upon him to inquire after his health, which in truth was far from good; he was willing to stay and dine, or leave his father to himself, just as the latter pleased, and had thus unknowingly often afforded him intense relief. Ralph Pennicuick had hitherto been the most independent of men; he was not indeed particularly 'full of resources'—which generally implies drawing, painting, playing the flute, making artificial flies, deciphering double acrostics, and other little elegant accomplishments—but he was generally satisfied with his own society and the companionship of a cigar and a French novel; but there were now times when it seemed intolerable to him to be alone. And yet Raymond's company had been unpleasant to him from the apprehension that he might return to the topic of Nelly Conway. The recency of his own return to England and, later, the catastrophe of Mrs. Conway's death, had hitherto perhaps preserved him from the discussion of this unpleasant subject, but he had a presentiment that it would come sooner or later, and it was well to take precautions. Under ordinary circumstances, and when no such weight was on his mind as now habitually oppressed it, he would have taken a very short way with both Raymond and the girl: 'Marry and starve' would have been his reply to the former, while he would not have scrupled to point out to the latter, that if in

becoming his son's wife she was under the expectation of making a good match, she was mistaken. But with the consciousness of what he had done as respected her dead father, and of what he was resolved to fail to do as respected herself, he could not take this high hand. He had been a bully and he had of late become a scoundrel; but he could not—at least as yet—brazen out his crime by any species of tyrannical swagger. He had, as we have seen, already astonished Raymond by his unwonted liberality towards the widow and her daughter, and the same tenderness of conscience led him now in the same direction, and even still further, inasmuch as the survivor was not objectionable to him. Only his mind was fixed that she should never marry Raymond.

It was under these circumstances that Ralph Pennicuick composed his letter to her.

'My dear Miss Nelly,—You will, I am sure, understand that nothing short of serious indisposition prevented my attendance at——'

Here a strange thing happened; the door of the bedroom in which the dead woman had lain up to that very morning opened slowly outward. It was a thing that had happened to him—as it has probably happened to all of us—half a dozen times before. An insecure catch of the lock, a draught, a weakened hinge—any or all of these things might have occasioned it; but the effect upon the witness was very remarkable. His fingers stiffened upon the pen and grew damp and clammy, his brow was bedewed with sweat; his eyes stared at the advancing door with stony horror. This was but for a minute at most: then he rose quickly, walked steadily to the door, closed it, and resumed his seat. His occupation, however, he was unable to resume. His mind was clear as to

what he wished to write, but his trembling hand could no longer obey his wishes. He sat feeling his wrist and noting its pulsations by the clock upon the mantelpiece and with an anxious look upon his face. He was no longer a prey to superstitious terror, but thoroughly alarmed upon his own account. Nothing but physical ailment—something seriously wrong in his system—could have caused him, he was well convinced, to have been so weak and foolish. He felt as if he had had a warning—not of the supernatural sort—and it was not the first by many, though he had never before experienced so rude a shock. His sea voyage had been by no means so beneficial as he had promised to himself; he had been nervous and 'shaky' all along, and, having no confidence in the chief surgeon, had resorted to a remedy which he knew to be a dangerous one. He turned to it now, though by no means eagerly—as he was aware might be the case some day. He took from his side pocket a silver flask, and poured himself out a little brandy; 'just a thimbleful,' as he murmured to himself in an apologetic tone. 'I must really see Green about this before it goes any further.'

Then he lit a cigar, and placing his chair so that he faced the bedroom door, continued his letter.

'You will, I am sure, understand that nothing short of serious indisposition prevented my attendance at the funeral of your poor mother. I am deeply grieved not to have been able to pay her that last sad tribute of respect; but, to say truth, I could not trust myself to do so. My health, already broken down by recent events, has altogether given way beneath this last catastrophe.'

Here he paused, pen in hand, and then wrote, with many alterations and erasures: 'There are no more friendships for me,

to be called such; and when I have seen Raymond suitably married, I feel that then there will be little else for me to live for.' The word 'suitably' had been selected with especial care. He gave an approving nod as he wrote it down. 'One satisfaction, however, I have promised myself; namely, to make sure that she who was nearest and dearest to my departed friend shall be placed above all carking care. You must permit me, dear Miss Nelly, for his sake [here his hand shook so that the words were hardly decipherable: but that was of small consequence, as the note was but a rough copy], to settle on you, for life, the sum of four hundred pounds a year. The first quarter of this, as you may be in present need of funds, I shall instruct Mr. Tatham, my solicitor, to pay over to you at once.' At first he intended to end here; but on perusing the composition, it struck him that the allusion to Raymond's future prospects as respected matrimony had hardly sufficient directness. 'I need not say how pleased I shall always be to hear of your well-being, and especially to welcome, in due time, the man who may have the good fortune to win your heart, and supply to you the place of those whose loss now doubtless appears irreparable.

'Yours always faithfully,

'RALPH PENNICUICK.'

It was a letter by no means characteristic of the writer, and had consequently cost him infinite pains. But upon the whole he was well satisfied with it. It was liberal (or at least the recipient must needs think so); it was sympathetic, as he flattered himself; and, above all, it expressed his intentions as to Raymond without the possibility of a mistake. It did flash across him for a moment that, if his offer was accepted, the girl might take his money and

his son too, who, with that three hundred a year of his own, of the possession of which he was yet in ignorance, would then have sufficient for an independent subsistence. But there would be an opportunity of guarding against that in the deed of settlement. It would, at all events, be doing more harm than good to allude at present to a contingency which the letter itself placed, by implication, out of the question.

It was some hours before the post went out to Richmond, but Ralph Pennicuick felt that the sooner it was sent the better; and wishing, for certain reasons of his own, that it should not pass through Mr. Hatton's hands, he went out and posted it himself at once.

CHAPTER VI.

A DELICATE TOPIC.

If when we lose a limb the pain were done with, so much importance would not be attached to that misfortune; but, as everybody knows who is acquainted with one who has thus suffered, there are periods when the patient seems to undergo the agony afresh, besides those ordinary and frequent occasions when, through accident, the wounded man receives a blow, and all the torments of the original catastrophe are renewed again. And thus it is with a wounded conscience. We may have taken the strongest measures with it; the 'actual cautery,' as it were, may have been applied, and we may flatter ourselves that, although a certain inconvenience —a sense of being no longer whole—may remain with us, the mischief has found its limits; that we shall not again be troubled by those remorseful pangs which are felt at first. But, alas, we find that no such comfort is vouchsafed us: the wound is there, and not until we have received so many such that we are morally head to foot a festering sore, do we lose the sense of its individual pain.

Ralph Pennicuick was what is called in pulpit phrase 'a man of sin' in many ways; but the course which he had adopted and was still pursuing with respect to his dead friend was the one dis-

honest action of his life; nor could he hope, by any subsequent behaviour, to become callous to it. He had flattered himself that when he had once made up his mind to neglect to fulfil his bargain with Conway, the affair would cease to give him trouble; the feverish days and wakeful nights that had befallen him had long proved that hope fallacious, and now he found that everything which had reference to his delinquency—however remote—was an instrument, not, indeed, of punishment, for punishment suggests expiation, but of retribution, and remorse, and woe. Even the narratives he had been compelled to give of Conway's death, the feelings he had been forced to affect concerning it, the reasons for this and that, in connection with it, he had been obliged to invent, had been gall and wormwood to him; but these references to the wronged dead were painless compared with the direct communications it had been necessary to have with the wronged living. The very idea of them had, as we have seen, been so hateful to him, that at some risk of involving nearer relations between Nelly and his son than already existed, he had sent Raymond as his envoy to Richmond; in spite of which precaution, the widow had visited him in person, discomfited him to the last degree with her suspicions and accusations, and eventually so died as to seem to lay her very death at his door. Then, in self-defence, he had had to write to Nelly about the inquest, a task which cost him not a little; and after all these things he had suffered a recurrence of his original feelings of remorse and shame. And now, when he had posted that second letter to the girl, which had seemed such a masterpiece of policy, and so thoroughly adapted for the main purpose he had now in view (and which, indeed, threatened to become the main purpose of his life), namely, that of quieting his

own mind by a judicious expenditure of money on Nelly, *now*, to his great disappointment and almost to his indignation, the cries of his half-stifled conscience broke forth afresh.

As he sat in his lonely room waiting for Raymond's return from the funeral, he felt so far from satisfied with himself that he had to debate the question of his own scoundrelship all over again, as though it had not already been settled half-a-dozen times in his favour. It seemed that there must be always a right of appeal for that unhappy case, however he might get it arranged or compromised in the courts below. Four hundred a year, there was no doubt, was an income sufficient for any young lady, and when, as in this instance, she had been accustomed to economical ways, it was something more than sufficient, it was handsome. But it was not the income derivable from 20,000*l.*, except at two per cent.; and it also suggested no hint of its being the interest of any such sum. Again, it was doubtless better for the girl that she should be thus provided for, and, while placed in comfort and even affluence, should be at the same time removed from the arts of Irish and other adventurers. But the question that would still intrude itself upon Ralph Pennicuick's mind, was what Arthur Conway had thought upon that matter when lying between life and death in Dhulang prison; he had probably been as good a judge of what would conduce to his daughter's happiness as a stranger; but at all events, and however that might be, it was certain that in return, for a very material value received, he had imposed certain conditions on his seeming friend which that gentleman had wilfully declined to fulfil, and *was still declining*. It was there, in the tail of the thing, that the sting lay. It was not as if he had robbed a man, and had done with it; robbery had become, as it were, his profes-

sion; it sometimes entailed the most shocking responsibilities upon him—such as the death of a fellow-creature, since certainly but for his behaviour Mrs. Conway would not have died; but he must needs follow it for all that; it was a business from which he could not retire; he was now robbing an orphan girl.

There was another thing that troubled Pennicuick immensely, though he fought against it with all his weakened powers. He had had from the first a consciousness that Arthur Conway was cognisant of what he was doing, and was in a manner present with him during all his planning and scheming to reconcile his conscience with himself and make all things pleasant and comfortable; and since the widow's death this conviction had grown upon him. Moreover, he now fancied them *both* possessed of his shameful secret, and regarding him with accusing eyes. This monstrous idea was one very inconsonant with his nature, and which his intelligence exceedingly resented; it got the mastery over him only in moments of physical weakness, and never after a good meal or a glass of wine; but it always seemed on the watch to possess his mind. It was not substantive at present; he never actually seemed to see these phantoms of his brain, but he had a secret fear lest he should see them, and this (among other things) made his own society distasteful to him. If the companionship of others was not absolutely a comfort to him, he felt it to be a sort of safeguard.

It was with genuine satisfaction therefore that Ralph Pennicuick received his son's visits, and never more so than on the afternoon of Mrs. Conway's funeral, when he had made provision in his note to Nelly against all consequences, in case the topic which he had always apprehended should be started from Raymond's

lips. He felt sure that Raymond would come, and he did so. He was in deep black of course; his face was pale; his eyes looked as if he had been weeping. It was natural enough, and his father had expected it, for he knew the lad to be of a sentimental nature; 'soft' like his mother before him; and yet he resented these evidences of emotion. He felt it as a reproach to himself that his son should be so tender-hearted towards these Conways, though it was his own wish to affect to be so: and he also suspected that the tenderness had something to do with his liking for Nelly.

'Well, my lad, you must be glad it is over. It must have been a sad morning's work.' He purposely spoke curtly to let Raymond know that he did not wish to touch upon the subject more than was necessary.

'Yes, sir; it was very sad.'

'You told her, of course—I mean Nelly—how deeply I felt for her, and how I regretted my enforced absence from the funeral.'

'I had no speech with her at all, sir; she was not in a state to be spoken to.'

'Ah, I dare say; poor girl! Well, well, these are things that happen to all of us. All we can do is to make it as easy as we can for her. Those Wardlaws fortunately seem to have taken a fancy to her.'

'Yes; they are kindness itself. Mrs. Wardlaw told me they are going to take her away to the seaside, somewhere, as soon as possible.'

'Quite right to remove her from all painful associations. The very thing I should have advised myself. We must take care, however, to save her from all sense of obligation.'

'I think that can hardly be, sir; indeed, I think it is a comfort to her to feel indebted to such good friends.'

'In a sentimental point of view, no doubt; but she would not like them to pay money for her.'

'They are not people to think of that,' said Raymond confidently.

'Very likely not; I dare say they are free enough with their money; persons of their class often are; but I confess, from what I have seen of them, they seem rather a vulgar couple. At all events, I have taken measures to place her upon a proper footing with them.'

'I hope you have not written to Mr. Wardlaw,' said Raymond, flushing up, 'to offer——'

'Of course not. I have nothing to do with Mr. Wardlaw. I have written to Nelly herself. She is a sensible girl and will, I am sure, understand her own position. I am going to allow her 400*l.* a year for life; that will be an ample provision for her wants, while at the same time it will not attract the greed of adventurers. If she marries suitably—' here Ralph Pennicuick rose and put the clock straight upon the mantelpiece, to avoid meeting his son's eyes—'I propose in addition to settle a lump sum upon herself and children.'

'I have a few words to speak to you, father, upon that subject,' said Raymond suddenly, moved by an impulse of desperation. 'I expressed them in a letter to you I sent to China, but which you have not as yet received.'

'About a settlement on Nelly Conway,' returned the other, with affected astonishment; 'how could that possibly have happened?'

'No, sir, not about the settlement, but about Nelly herself. I—that is she——'

'Now, I hope you are not going to make a fool of yourself, my lad,' interrupted the other sharply. 'I am not in a state of health to endure worry.'

'I am very sorry to give you any annoyance, sir, but this is a matter upon which some time or another I must speak, and if I were silent now you might afterwards accuse me, with good reason, of duplicity. From my childhood upwards I have loved no human being as I have loved Nelly Conway——'

'You are certainly candid,' put in Ralph Pennicuick; 'you make no exception, then, even of your father.'

'Indeed, sir, I have always loved you also and striven to obey you in all things; but this is a love of another kind, a boy's love for a girl you may say, but it has passed through that phase, and is now a deep-seated passion, the one hope of my life.' Raymond paused, from sheer agitation, for he was deeply moved; his father, who had produced a penknife, and had begun deliberately to pare his nails, regarded him with an amused air.

'This is curious, my dear Raymond, but it is not unparalleled, though I confess I have never experienced anything of the same kind myself. Perhaps I was not quite so particular in the objects of my attachments; before I was your age I had half-a-dozen of them.'

'I have never loved but one woman,' returned the young man gravely.

'Dear me! and you are almost one-and-twenty! The gentle passion, however, does sometimes delay to seize a man till late in

life; then, as with the measles, it is all the more dangerous; at sixty, my dear Raymond, you will be like the Grand Turk.'

'I beseech you, sir, not to treat what I am about to say to you as a jest,' answered the young man earnestly. 'I know that my appeal is distasteful to you; it grieves me more than I can express to urge it under the present circumstances; I entreat you, however, to bear with me. It is the first time, I think, that I have ever had the misfortune to act counter to your wishes.'

'Let us say to *propose* to act counter to them,' observed the other quietly.

'Indeed, sir, there are some matters which override all the ordinary rules and duties of life,' replied Raymond quickly. 'My heart is so bound up in this one that I cannot answer for my own fealty to you. We are told to leave father and mother to cleave to her that is our wife——'

'You don't mean to say you have dared to marry this girl!' cried Ralph Pennicuick, starting up in fury.

'No, sir; I have not married her.' For the moment he wished he had, since such a possibility had crossed his father's mind; he would now have known the worst that could be done with him; and it could be no worse--or so it seemed to him—than being denied his suit.

'It is lucky for you, sir,' answered the other menacingly, but not without a sigh of relief. 'You would have been married over a broomstick, since that is how beggars wed. I shall now take care, in making arrangements for this young woman's subsistence, that no misfortune shall happen to her such as you have had in contemplation.'

'This is the penalty of frankness, then!' observed Raymond bitterly.

'It will be the penalty of filial disobedience, sir,' answered the other curtly. 'I stand aghast at your audacity, but not more so than at the craft and cunning that have been disclosed in this girl so early. She has been much mistaken, however, in her calculations.'

'You misjudge her altogether, father,' said Raymond, interrupting in his turn, but speaking with great gravity and deliberation. 'Craft and cunning are unknown to her. She does not harbour a selfish thought. She is utterly ignorant of my appeal to you.'

'And also of your devotion to her, no doubt,' observed the other cynically.

'She knows I love her. How could she help knowing it, when I have been her companion for years? Nor do I deny that my love is returned, though I have not her permission to affirm it.'

This piece of delicacy was, unfortunately for his own views, quite lost upon the elder gentleman. If he had understood what Raymond literally meant, that Nelly had forbidden him to use her as an ally in pleading with his father, he might have made some capital out of it; but he set down this statement as merely another specimen of the young fellow's 'maundering' and 'softness' which was to be met with contemptuous indifference like all the rest of it. Still his *rôle* was to be good-natured as well as firm.

'My good sir, this whole love affair of yours is a chimera,' exclaimed he, 'a mere monster of your amorous imagination. It can no more take a solid practical shape than yonder clouds over Piccadilly. It will presently dissolve—perhaps with a tear or two

on her side—and leave the future all the clearer for both of you. There is no sort of reality about it.'

'I can understand your saying that, father, if I were asking you for any considerable allowance to support us,' pleaded Raymond. 'I don't think I have ever shown myself greedy in that way, or—or—extravagant as some young fellows are. I have heard you say as much yourself. And I don't wish you to trench upon your own income, so as to be a burden to you in any way. I thought if you would add another 200*l.* to my own allowance ——'

'Not a shilling, not a penny,' interrupted the other impatiently. 'You should have no allowance from me at all. And I need not add, that this girl would have none either. What you are urging me to do, in fact, is to hold my hand as respects herself. You are seeking to impoverish the very being to whom you pretend to be attached. As to your own moderate way of living, I don't wish to detract from its merits; it does you credit; but, on the other hand, you would be a fool to be extravagant. If you raised money, it would be at a ruinous interest, for you well know, and the Jews know, that I am not one to be crossed. Then as to my not making you a large allowance, I am not in the position to do so.'

'I have never hinted that you should do so, sir,' said Raymond gloomily. He was very unwilling that his father should enter upon this topic, lest he should be obliged to disbelieve him. He could not forget that 20,000*l.* of which Mr. Tatham the lawyer had informed him when he had thought that Raymond had come into his kingdom; any plea of poverty put forward by his father must needs, he was therefore aware, be a pretence. It is impos-

sible, however, for a mean man to be otherwise than secretive. When pushed with relation to pecuniary affairs, he resorts to the expedient of the cuttle-fish; he darkens the whole matter; and when it comes to giving reasons for his economies, he will lie. And thus it happened with Ralph Pennicuick; only, instead of being pushed, he was volunteering falsehood.

'You may, nevertheless, Raymond, have expected more,' continued the other. 'You may have formed an exaggerated view of my fortune. It amounts to no great sum, as I have more than once endeavoured to point out to you, and there are many demands upon it of which you know nothing. At the same time, it is not so despicable that you should risk losing it, by opposing yourself to my wishes.'

'Pray cease to threaten me, sir,' cried Raymond suddenly; 'I cannot bear it.'

This was not spoken in a pleading voice: the son's tone had quite as much menace in it as that of the father: the word was I 'can' not, but the meaning was I 'will' not. Ralph Pennicuick fully understood this. His face grew set, and hard; he pressed his thin lips tightly together, and his eyes shot a glance like flame.

'By heaven, young man, you are independent enough!' he began angrily; then he suddenly recollected that he *was* independent, though he did not know it; that in a few weeks he would have three hundred a year with which to do as he pleased. If he showed this audacity when for all he knew he was a pauper, how would he behave when he should be no longer indebted to another for supplies! Ralph regretted for the first time that he had hitherto 'kept his son so short,' since his habits of economy would now render him the more independent of him.

'By heaven, young man, you are independent enough!—but it is ungenerous of you thus to take advantage of a father's affection. You know that I could never leave you to starve; but that should hardly have encouraged you to ask what by your own confession you knew would be distasteful to me, and was indeed as improper as it was impracticable.'

'Improper, sir? What is there improper in my attachment to the daughter of your friend? If he is cognisant of the request I make—if the dead can know what is affecting their nearest and dearest——'

'Be silent, sir,' cried Ralph shrilly, while a shudder passed over his hard face, like a shadow blown about a crag. 'I will not be dictated to, or taught my duty by a boy. I cannot believe that such wilful disobedience can be the product of your own nature. I believe that this girl is egging you on. I will write to her in plain terms, so that at least she shall not ruin both herself and you with her eyes shut.'

'I entreat you, I beseech you, sir, not to do that,' exclaimed Raymond passionately. 'Let it be sufficient that I have failed to move you; that the one favour I have asked of you during my whole life has been refused.'

'If I remain silent,' said Ralph, 'you on your part must pledge yourself not to blast this young woman's prospects by urging her to act in opposition to my will.'

'I promise that, sir,' said Raymond gloomily.

'Very good; your word I know is to be depended upon. Now, if you will take my advice, you will give yourself a holiday, and mix a little more in the world of pleasure than, it seems, you have

of late been doing. If you want money for a fling—fifty pounds or so——'

'I want no money, sir, thank you.'

'Well, well, if you do, apply to me; what is mine is yours, my lad. I have no other aim in life than to see you happy—that is, in a reasonable way; mingling with your *equals*, and remaining in that sphere to which you naturally belong. You will thank me some day for what you now consider to be my cruelty. I would say, Stay to dine with me, but this talk has upset me. Go to the opera to-night; see Léonie in the ballet: they tell me she's charming.'

And so father and son took leave of one another.

CHAPTER VII.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

When we speak of natural beauty, it is generally the face which we have in our eye or in our mind's eye: it is only a few enthusiasts who rave about a woman's ears or the nape of her neck; we even say 'the face of nature' when extolling the charms of a landscape. But in England, at least, there is one exception to this general rule, namely the Isle of Wight. In that case our admiration is always reserved for the 'back of the island.' The few miles of road that lie between Blackgang and Sandown Bay form a sort of marine Fairyland. Its loveliness is undeniable, but it is Lilliputian. The romances which are enacted there lie in a nutshell, but they are very numerous. It is sometimes called the Garden of England, but, if so, it is the back garden—as immortalised in the lives of Vilikins and his Dinah: a charming plot of ground, removed from the madding crowd, and open only to the sea and sky, but of very limited extent. Within this enchanted area lies Sandybeach. I suppose more happy brides have dated their first letters to the objects of their eternal school-friendships from Sandybeach than from any place of ten times its size within Her Majesty's dominions. Cupid hovers everywhere; over the level sands, over the sparkling sea, over the wooded cliffs, as though he were—the

reverse, some cynics whisper, of his usual character—a gull. At all seasons his victims are seen arm-in-arm, or hand-in-hand, or even still more tenderly connected, parading the shore, or strolling through the pocket wilderness of the Undercliff. Life is an idyll in this exquisite village, and endures for a month exactly. I know an old gentleman who has been three times a Benedict, who has always spent his honeymoons in this sweet spot, and still cordially recommends it to friends about to marry. It is also by reason of its quiet and seclusion frequented by the afflicted in mind. So soon as her gentle guest began to gather strength after the double blow that cruel fate had dealt her, Mrs. Wardlaw said to her husband, 'John, we must take Nelly to Sandybeach.' And they took her.

The poor girl did not herself care where she went; it seemed to her that all places were alike now—all darkened by the shadow of death and environed by the waters of bitterness; but the sunshine and the sea had balm in them. In a few days that first oppression of grief which seems almost to threaten physical suffocation, as well as to sink the heart down to bottomless depths, was mitigated. The clouds lifted a little from her mental view, and through the misty grey of life shone here and there a speck of blue.

Ralph Pennicuick's letter, strange to say, had done her good. It had roused her from the lethargy of grief, by compelling a reply to him, and at the same time had given her a rough reminder of the immediate necessity for exertion. She positively declined his offer of pecuniary aid. She had no doubt of the propriety of that course of action, but perhaps she would have been puzzled to account for all the causes that led her to adopt it. His proposal was

kind— if there was some lack of kindliness in the terms in which it was conveyed—and certainly liberal; she acknowledged that very readily; she had certainly no claim upon Mr. Pennicuick's purse, and he had opened it freely, but, somehow, she felt, even if she were ailing in health, and unfit to gain her own living, that she could never have touched the contents of it. He had been her father's friend, it was true; and his present generosity would seem to prove that that friendship had been genuine: yet, somehow, it failed to do so. So far from accepting the gift for her father's sake, her very love for her father would have urged her to decline it, even had there not been more cogent reasons for her refusal. Her mother's dislike to Ralph Pennicuick was a still more unsurmountable barrier. The bounty her mother had refused she for her part could certainly not have accepted in any case. This consideration was of course final and sufficient for her: but she also felt a secret disinclination to become the pensioner of Raymond's father. It behoved her in all things to be independent, but above all things to be independent of any bond with Raymond or Raymond's belongings. It made no difference that certain phrases in the elder Pennicuick's letter had their full significance for her: that she quite perceived that his offer covered a tacit understanding that his son and she should be no more than friends; the words, as she read them, had called up a blush of indignation into her cheeks, as well as innocent shame. But she was not going to be bribed into discarding Raymond, though she was quite resolved not to permit him to become her suitor. Perhaps she experienced a little satisfaction in the thought that her rejection of Ralph Pennicuick's bounty would give him some alarm upon his son's account though there would be no cause for it. And yet his letter

had not wholly failed in its intention. She had been resolved before that she would never disclose her tenderness for Raymond, however persevering might be his importunity, but now she was doubly sure of herself; for that her weakness in this respect would be a cause of quarrel between his father and himself was now made known to her for certain.

She had taken her time—an interval of at least two days—in writing her reply to Ralph Pennicuick; a circumstance that had given him great disquietude, for he had at once pictured her to himself as communicating his offer to Raymond and consulting with him upon its acceptance, or perhaps even arranging with him some common plan of action. Her reason for the delay, however, was simply that her would-be benefactor should understand that her rejection of his offer was deliberate, and therefore final. She thanked him, of course, but without effusion; nor did she hint at any of the reasons which, in truth, actuated her conduct, with the exception of her wish for independence. 'I feel,' she wrote, 'that there is now no happiness for me but in work; and for that I must have the incentive of necessity.'

She did not consult with either her host or hostess, but told them all about it when she had settled the matter.

'Well, my dear, I think you have been a little too sensitive,' said Mrs. Wardlaw (who, however, had not seen Mr. Pennicuick's letter). 'The man is rolling in wealth, and keeps his only son as short as though he had a dozen of them. What could he do better with his hoarded money than give you some of it? He evidently thinks you have some claim——'

'Nay,' interrupted Nelly, 'that is not so. I have no claim whatever; and indeed he expressly stated so on another occasion'

(she was alluding to that of the inquest). 'I think you are scarcely just to him.'

'Well, you know, my dear, I hate him,' said Mrs. Wardlaw frankly. 'I think him a selfish, bad man. His treatment of his son is alone a proof of it, if there were no other. When people are rich and mean, it is quite right to get everything out of them we can. It is like so much saved out of a fire.'

'But I should not like to take that sort of salvage,' said Nelly, smiling.

'Well, perhaps not, though I should like to see it taken. But this case is different. If conscience induces such a man in any one thing to act handsomely and honourably, I think it is your duty—your moral duty—to let him do it. It will probably be his last endeavour to perform a good action of any kind.'

'I don't see how his conscience can have anything to do with it, my dear Mrs. Wardlaw. He is simply moved by a kind impulse, though he does not express it, perhaps, in the most gracious manner.'

'How should he?' returned Mrs. Wardlaw. 'He does not know how, because this is his first attempt. However, as you have said "No," so let it be. Fortunately we are not dependent on him, my darling.'

She stooped down and gave Nelly, who was at her easel, a hearty kiss. The use of the word 'we' was very delicate; it signified that the girl was as a daughter of their own, and as such entitled to her share of their prosperity. Nelly understood it thoroughly, but, except for the tender tones of her reply, ignored it.

'Yes, dear Mrs. Wardlaw, I feel that I do not need much

help. I have your love and sympathy, without which I should be poor indeed; and with those allies I feel myself strong enough, thank heaven, to do my own work in the world, and in time, I hope, to earn my own living. What do you think of my little sketch here? It is very slight, but audaciously ambitious. I mean it for Ophelia.'

'I don't know the young lady,' replied Mrs. Wardlaw, putting up her glasses, 'and therefore can't speak as to her likeness. She's certainly very pretty, but seems to have rather a wild look about the eyes.'

Mrs. Wardlaw was certainly not a connoisseur in pictures; and even her husband could be scarcely said to be an art-critic, though he had a certain rough-and-ready estimate of the merits of a work which was not without its value. Nelly had had but little teaching, and knew how much she stood in need of it; but for the present Sandybeach would at least afford her objects for study, and afterwards she would place herself under professional guidance; at the lowest the place would give her occupation, which she felt to be essential to her.

They took rooms at a pleasant hotel on the very margin of the shore, and at first lived a very secluded life. Nelly and her hostess were all day in the open air; the former sketching, the latter knitting, or intent upon a page of some novel procured from the little circulating library in the place; I say 'a page,' because she seldom went beyond it; for literature had so immediately soothing an effect upon Mrs. Wardlaw, that she dropped to sleep under its influence at once. Then Nelly's pencil would drop too, and her eyes rest upon the far-stretching solitude of the sea, in melancholy thought, chiefly upon her dead father. The sea had always

separated them, and the sight of it perhaps suggested their eternal separation now. She had not set eyes on him since she had been a child, yet so long as he had been in the world, although so far removed, he had seemed near to her. The consciousness that his loving heart was beating in unison with her own, though ever so far away, had annihilated distance; but now all was distance, solitary space, infinity. The sense of loneliness seemed almost more than she could bear. Why should she think of working? What good would it do, even if she succeeded in her works, beyond keeping her alive? And what was there left to live for? She was well in health, she had felt herself getting better and stronger ever since her removal from Richmond; but she almost regretted it. She believed that she would some day meet her father in heaven; oh, would that it could be soon! Her friends were kind to her, beyond all expectation or her own desert, but they could never fill the void around her. She was alone, and must needs remain alone, till her dying day.

One afternoon Mrs. Wardlaw was indisposed—had a headache which the sunshine would only aggravate—and as she would not hear of Nelly remaining within-doors for her sake, the girl went out alone.

Mr. Wardlaw was in London, to which he paid pretty frequent visits, the picturesque not having a continuous attraction for him. Nelly took her sketch-book and sauntered across the sands to her favourite bay. It was a less retired one than many others, and therefore—though it seems a paradox—was always more deserted; the happy pairs who formed the majority of the visitors to Sandy-beach affecting the more secluded coves and dells. The day was lovely, with a fresh wind that drove the shadows across the sea,

but was hardly felt in the sheltered spot which Nelly had selected for herself. She took her seat upon a rock with her little box of water-colours beside her, intending to have a long afternoon's work. But as usual, when alone, under similar circumstances, she fell a-thinking. Only—what was most unusual—her thoughts on this occasion escaped from her control. Instead of dwelling upon the dear ones she had lost, or facing the difficulties of her future, they played truant and took holiday. Who is there of us who, at times, has not ventured to picture to himself the Unobtainable; to portray the happiness which he knows can never befall him, and which in his more collected moments he resolutely ignores? It is a foolish indulgence, and brings with it certain punishment; for though we know all along we are but dreaming, the life to which we wake is all the sadder for it. Indeed, this is one of the few weaknesses which bitter experience compels us to forego; to contemplate the Might-be is bad enough, but endurable because of the bare possibility of its being realised; but to think on the Might-have-been, the Irrevocable, the Impossible, is too severe an ordeal even for the best disciplined mind.

Nelly's errant thoughts had strayed to Raymond. He had written to her once since her mother's funeral; a kind, but undemonstrative letter, in her reply to which she had informed him of her approaching departure for Sandybeach; but he had not come down to Richmond to see her. She understood both his reticence and his absence—she would have done so, even if she had not received his father's communication—and she had persuaded herself that all was lost. If he would remain silent and absent long enough, her image would gradually fade from his honest heart and be replaced by some worthier object: it was in process of fading

now, no doubt; the knowledge of Mr. Pennicuick's aversion to his suit, communicated to him long before the present date, and probably with great force and directness, must needs have had its effect. Raymond must have given up all thoughts of her—as a lover—as she herself had bade him do. There could be no great harm, then, in letting her mind dwell upon him, since the punishment of her folly would be all her own; it would be severe, she knew—no vague regrets, but an exceeding bitter pain; but the temptation had come suddenly upon her, and she could not resist it. She called to mind the happy years of childhood they had spent together, more harmoniously than brother with sister: they had had no quarrels, for he had always been to her as knight to lady, a gentle yet gallant guardian and champion of her right. And in boyhood he had been the same, though now and then, something that had dropped from her mother's lips, or Mr. Pennicuick's, had suggested to her that they were not upon terms of perfect equality; that he would be rich and she would be poor. Then Mr. Pennicuick had made long absences, and Raymond and herself had been thrown more and more together, and these suggestions had ceased (her mother perhaps had had her own reasons for not recurring to them), and love had grown up between them before they were aware. As in childhood so in manhood, Raymond had ever shown himself unselfish, generous, and devoted to her; and what was still rarer, young as he was, he had won her respect from his behaviour to others. Her mother had been very fond of him, in spite of his dutifulness towards the father she had hated, and which had forbidden him to listen to her, even when eloquent on his own wrongs. Mrs. Wardlaw would have loved him like a son, if she had not stood in just a little fear of him; she had once ad-

vised him to take a high hand in certain dealings with his father —respecting pecuniary matters—and had been rebuked for her interference. Nelly was aware of the total want of sympathy between the elder and younger Pennicuick, and admired the latter beyond measure for his patience and filial submission. She felt that the relation which in her own case had been the chief happiness of her life, was in his a sore and grievous trial. Altogether this young fellow was her ideal of what a man should be; and—and—he could never be hers, but only one to be admired and worshipped a long way off, or, if he came near, to be repressed and put aside. Only, in her thought, to-day, he had not been put aside, but brought very, very near to her, as he had been, in spite of herself, when the tidings of his father's death had come, and he had seemed to be his own master, to wed with whom he would. Oh, if only that might have been, she would not now have been alone in the world, without hope, or ambition, or a future—to be called such. Her hope would have been that she would never lose his love, her ambition to be worthy of retaining it, her Future one clear blue, or if clouded, only as the heavens above her, with such hurrying clouds as passed and left her sky the purer. She was dreaming thus, when a shadow from no cloud fell on the sand before her, and looking up with a quick start of alarm, she beheld the object of her thoughts—Raymond Pennicuick himself.

Nellie and Raymond.

CHAPTER VIII.

REJECTED.

If in the long picture gallery of Hallington Manor, the ancestral home of Ralph Pennicuick, but into which he never willingly set foot, Nelly had been contemplating some full-length portrait of Raymond, and had seen it suddenly slip out of its frame, she could have been hardly more astonished than at his appearance before her now in flesh and blood—like an illustration to the biography she had been compiling of herself. If he had been his own ghost, she could never have stared at him with more tremulous affright.

'I am afraid I have alarmed you, Nelly,' said he gently. 'I ought to have remembered that the sand gives no warning of one's approach, though it is such a tell-tale when we have passed by.'

'But it was so unexpected, Raymond.'

'Why should it be, Nelly?' The hand she had held out to him he retained for a little, and then relinquished with a pressure that he had of late omitted to use. 'It was surely only natural that I should come to see you as soon as circumstances admitted of it. I called at the hotel, and Mrs. Wardlaw told me where to find you—you are not sorry to see me, are you?'

'Indeed I am not, Raymond.' What were the 'circumstances,'

she wondered, to which he alluded? Why had he come down now, and not before? Why did he press her hand with such tender meaning? Why did he look at her so lovingly as he had not ventured to do since their talk in that Richmond garden? Was it possible, after all, that he had gained permission to speak to her —as he had been speaking to her in her day-dream five minutes ago? If he had not, he was very cruel, and yet—

'You are looking better for the Sandybeach air, dear Nelly, I am delighted to see. You have got back your own sweet roses.'

'I am very well,' answered she quickly; 'it is a very healthy place. How is Mr. Pennicuick?'

Raymond's face grew dark; she knew at once that it was not by his father's leave that he had come down to see her; she even suspected there had been a quarrel between them.

'My father is much the same,' he answered. 'Strangely altered from the man he was before he last left England, but the same as he has been since his return. Dr. Green does not detect anything organically wrong; but there is something seriously amiss with him. It is more difficult than ever,' he added, after a pause, 'to overcome his prejudices or preconceived opinions upon any subject.'

'That is only to be expected, Raymond,' answered Nelly gently.

'Yes, but there is a limit to the forbearance due to an invalid, even when he is one's father: that is to say, our duty to him must not override considerations that affect the happiness of others as well as our own.'

Nelly bowed her head; she knew of course to what he was

alluding, but she would give him no encouragement to pursue the topic.

'Perhaps I had no right to say "of others,"' continued he, after a pause of expectation, 'even when speaking to you alone?'

'I think you have no right to talk at all to me upon the subject—if it be the one which we agreed together should for the future be a sealed one between us.'

'Except under certain contingencies,' he put in hastily.

'There was one, and only one, Raymond, and you have just informed me that that has not taken place. You are breaking your plighted word in reopening any discussion concerning——'

'One moment, Nelly,' interrupted the young man passionately. 'You must have patience with me, and hear me and my cause before dismissing it—and me—for ever. I have not broken faith, as you will acknowledge, in thus addressing you again, in thus, if you will have it so, importuning you again. I am sorry to distress you, I would give my life to save you pain—but then I am pleading for more than life. Moreover, I have an excuse; I am in a different position from that I occupied upon the last occasion when I dared to say, "I love you, dearest."'

'In a better one then, I hope—that is, for your sake,' she added hastily.

'I thought you would have hoped it for both our sakes,' replied he. He had no selfish motive in thus speaking, no desire to make her commit herself, to acknowledge her love for him, before he had shown that their union was practicable. He spoke only out of his heart's abundance; but directly the words had passed his lips he perceived that such an interpretation was possible. 'I am not come to trouble you, Nelly,' he went on

earnestly; 'but only to say a few words on—business. My father wrote to you some weeks ago, I think.'

'Yes, he did. He was good enough to renew the same offer to myself that he made through you to my poor mother. An allowance of 400*l.* a year. It was very handsome of him.'

Raymond shook his head.

'Well, so I thought, at all events, and I think so now. But I refused it. I am sure you think that I did right.'

'I am not sure I do,' said Raymond thoughtfully. 'May I ask if that offer was made without conditions?'

Nelly hesitated; the conditions had been only implied.

'There was no condition stated,' she answered after a little pause.

'Then you ought to have taken the allowance, Nelly. My father would never have felt it; it would have been a mere flea-bite. He is a much richer man than you or I ever imagined him to be.'

'I have never given my attention to the extent of Mr. Pennicuick's fortune.'

'I don't suppose you have, Nelly,' answered the young man gravely; 'and what appears to some people curious is that *I* had not considered the matter myself. Only when—when that false tidings first came over from China, my father's lawyer, Mr. Tatham, had occasion to make certain disclosures to me. If matters had turned out as then seemed certain, I should (he told me) be a very rich man. Four hundred a year out of my income would certainly not have hurt me.'

'That makes no difference as to my case,' observed Nelly, wondering whither all this should tend.

'Perhaps not; and to mine only indirectly; thus: my father sent for his lawyer the other day, and, talking to him of this and that, expressed his wish that I was not to be told of his possession of a certain sum, no less than 20,000*l.*—of the existence of which he supposed me to be ignorant; only Tatham had, as it happened, already informed me of the fact. No doubt my father would have been angry: especially as the disclosure was made under the impression that I had succeeded to his throne; and hereupon the lawyer felt great alarm. In order to bribe me to secrecy—though I hope such a precaution was unnecessary—he has entrusted me with another secret, which time indeed must needs soon disclose—but which in the mean time is of immense importance to me. I started off within half an hour after I heard it to come and tell it you with my own lips.'

'Indeed! It is good news, I trust, though I cannot read it in your face.'

'Because my face does not know whether it be good or—indifferent. That will depend on you, Nelly.'

Raymond's voice was always musical, but this time when he spoke her name it sounded like the fragment of a song. She was still sitting on the stone, with her paint-brush lying idle in its box beside her; her face was turned up to his with quiet firmness, as he stood on the sand with his eyes fixed tenderly—but not confidently—upon her. There was genuine passion in his tone, but also earnestness, as though he believed with all his heart in the arguments he was about to urge; yet he had the air of a man who is pleading a lost cause.

'I did speak to my father about you, Nelly, though without

using your name to back my suit. If I had done so, it would have been all the same. He would never, I think, have given his consent to our marriage.'

'It was not likely, Raymond; anyone but yourself would have known as much.'

'It was natural that I should put faith in my own father,' said he simply. 'I thought I could have convinced him that my happiness was bound up in winning you; perhaps I did convince him, but if so, his will over-rode that consideration.' There was a tinge of bitterness in his speech that she had never observed before. 'At all events, he positively denied my prayer. He said that he could not make the least provision for our subsistence, in case I married you in the teeth of his disapproval, and that we should in fact be beggars.'

'I expected neither more nor less,' said Nelly quietly.

'Yes, but he—well, he omitted to say something which it did not suit him to say, but which Mr. Tatham has told me. Now let me ask you a question, Nelly. Are you ambitious? Have you set your mind on marrying a rich man? Are carriages and horses and men-servants necessary to your scheme of life?'

'Except since I have been living with Mrs. Wardlaw, I never tried them,' answered Nelly with a quiet smile. 'They do not give me any great pleasure as a guest, nor would it make much difference, I think, if I were their mistress.'

'I thought so,' exclaimed Raymond eagerly; 'it is only what I expected. You would be content with a little, even a very little, if it were shared with one you love. Nelly, darling, I have some money of my own left me by my mother, and which, when I come of age, will fall into my own hands. It will make me independent

of my father; I am free, therefore, to marry you. Will you take me, Nelly, poor as I am?'

If, instead of using the first words that Love suggested, he had given himself up to composition for weeks, he could not have achieved a more eloquent peroration; that 'poor as I am' went straight to her very heart.

'Raymond, it is not *that*,' answered she earnestly. 'You have only done me justice in supposing that mere wealth would have little weight with me in such a matter; in your case it would have none whatever. But as regards the wish upon which you have set your boyish heart, believe me, Raymond, it can never be. I do not say but that it might have been, had your father come to a different decision. I know—for I have the utmost confidence in your generosity—that my frankness in confessing so much will be a reason why you should desist from importuning me. It can only be disappointment to yourself and pain to me.'

'You say "no," but you give no reasons,' pleaded Raymond bitterly.

'Because you are already in possession of them,' she answered quickly. 'What I said at Richmond, when you asked me the same question, I say again, and it has thrice the force that it had then. I am now certain that your father would never consent to our marriage: that he would cast you off as his son if you disobeyed him. Do you suppose that I, who have confessed my love for you, will be your ruin? If it were only that I should cause a breach between you two which time would heal, I should hesitate to do so; I should shrink from standing even for a day between a son and his father; but you know as well as I do, that if this gulf were made, it would never be bridged over. I should rob you both

of fortune and of father, and for ever. Raymond, so help me Heaven, I will not do it.'

'It was a foregone conclusion with you, then!' answered Raymond bitterly. 'You had resolved to deny me under all circumstances. You have not even asked what this independence is, which has bred in me such fruitless hope.'

'Because I knew it, Raymond. It is three hundred a year, the same sum which your father has always allowed you.'

'You knew it, and you never told me!' answered he reproachfully.

'I have not known it long: I did not tell you because I felt it might feed your hopes: I trusted that before you came to know it the matter might have been settled, as it has been, by your father's voice: with that against me, if the sum you can call your own had been thrice as large, I should have refused to be the cause of your disinheritance. But I shall always love you, Raymond.'

He put up his hand in mute appeal for silence; he knew that the love of which she spoke was not the love he sought, and had no wish to hear of any other.

'You will not part from me with anger in your heart?' said she; for, with bowed head, he had turned to go. 'I say, as I once said before, that you will thank me for this, one day, Raymond. It is as hard for me as it is for you, but it is right.'

'It is not so hard for you, or you would not do it,' he answered passionately. 'As for "right," do you think that this will reconcile me to my father—to the man who has parted you and me? No: I have lost you both.'

He stooped down quietly, kissed her forehead, and, with long strides upon the noiseless sand, took the way by which he had come.

'Why, Nelly, where is Raymond?' inquired Mrs. Wardlaw, when the girl, an hour afterwards, returned to the hotel. 'Is it possible he missed you?'

'No; I saw him,' said she.

'But he was to return and dine with us!' Then, with a change of voice, which showed that she had guessed the truth, 'Oh, Nelly, have you sent him away for ever?'

Her white pained face was answer enough.

'I am very, very sorry, Nelly darling. Have you counted the cost? Are you quite sure of yourself, my pet?'

'Quite sure, dear friend. I pray you never speak of it to me again.' She was quite sure, and if she had not counted the cost, it was because it was incalculable: but the subject was one she henceforth shrank from even in thought.

CHAPTER IX.

NEWS FROM CHINA.

From the day on which Raymond came and went so suddenly there fell a change on Nelly, and, as it seemed, for the better. She no longer affected her own company, or sought seclusion; her manner was cheerful, though a close observer might have thought it studiously so; she rather encouraged than otherwise her hostess's little expeditions of pleasure. One day, when Mr. Wardlaw was with them, she said, 'Suppose we dine at the *table d'hôte*?'

This unexpected suggestion was received with rapture. Mrs. Wardlaw was one of those persons who delight in dining in public; it was to her an innocent method of 'seeing life,' and she flattered herself that it expanded her mind. Her husband thought it a decidedly preferable notion to that of dining in their own room—which, however, for their guest's sake, he would have continued to do quite contentedly. His habits were eminently social, and heretofore he had only indulged himself with a nightly pipe in the public billiard-room.

The *table d'hôte* at the hotel was a new institution, but it was said to work well; which was the least that could be expected of it, since it certainly worked ill for those who took their meals in private. The staff of waiters was limited, and while the public

dinner was in progress, 'attendance' was difficult to procure elsewhere; while if you dined afterwards you got the warmed-up soup, the *réchauffé* cutlets, and the 'leavings' generally of the common table. The newly married couples who shrank from the public eye had doubtless consolations of their own for this neglect and ill-treatment, but Mr. and Mrs. Wardlaw were by no means a newly married couple, and liked their food hot and at first hand; so Nelly's proposition was eminently agreeable to them.

The seats of honour—that is, those at the head of the table—were filled as usual by the longest established guests, while the newcomers were placed by themselves at the other end. Opposite the Wardlaws' little party of three were some university men and their tutor; and next to them a young couple, who were by the company at once set down as 'turtle doves' recently united. The bird was so common in the locality, that that view of their relation was very excusable; especially as there was no family likeness between them. The man was bronzed and dark, while the lady was fair; and the former was very attentive to the latter. Still, Mrs. Wardlaw had a doubt about their relationship to one another, and expressed it.

'You may be right, my dear; you generally are upon such matters,' was her husband's whispered reply. 'If they are man and wife, it is certain the wedding must have been very recent; for the lady is so civil to him.'

When they returned to their sitting-room, Nelly was asked her opinion on the matter.

'I did not observe them very particularly,' said she.

'Her attention was absorbed by the Oxford gentlemen,' observed Mr. Wardlaw wickedly.

'In that case, I am sure that it was reciprocal,' answered his wife, carrying on this little joke; 'even the tutor was smitten; I heard him sigh over his apple dumpling. But none of those young men was to be compared with the personage we are discussing.'

'Do you mean the gentleman or the lady?'

'What nonsense, John! of course I mean the gentleman. A more washed-out uninteresting-looking creature than the woman I never beheld.'

Mr. Wardlaw laughed and rattled the silver in his pockets.

'Now, do you know what he's thinking, Nelly?' continued her hostess; 'that no woman can ever admire another woman. To punish him, let us send him off to make inquiries; and don't you come back, sir, till you discover what relation exists between those two people. You will find the man in the billiard-room, of course, in any case—unless he is much better than most husbands.'

In an hour or so Mr. Wardlaw came back, looking unusually grave.

'They are brother and sister,' was his report. 'Did you ever hear of the name of Milburn, Nelly?'

'Never, Mr. Wardlaw.'

'Well, he has heard of yours. He has just come from China, it seems.'

'What? Did he know poor papa?' asked Nelly, flushing.

'Oh yes; he was in the same regiment. He seemed very much interested when I told him who you were; and I said, I thought you might wish to talk to him.'

'Yes, indeed, I should like to do so.'

'In that case he will pay a visit to us to-morrow morning; so *that's* settled.'

When Nelly had retired to her room, considerably excited by this incident, her host and hostess had a little further talk about it.

'Well, John, and what do you think of this Mr. Milburn?'

'Oh, he seems a nice young fellow enough. He has come home, it appears, upon urgent private affairs, his uncle having died and made him his heir.'

'Dear me! then he has money?'

'Lot's of it: so much that he has been obliged to ask his sister to help him spend it. That was the woman we saw at dinner. There are the foundations, my dear, and now you can set to work and build your edifice.'

To this sarcastic observation Mrs. Wardlaw made no reply at the moment, but buried herself in the 'Saturday Review,' from whose columns, after half an hour or so, she emerged, with the vague remark, 'Well, it seems to me it would be the best for her, poor darling;' and lighting her flat candle, marched up to bed.

In the forenoon of the next day Mr. Henry Milburn paid a formal call, nominally on Mrs. Wardlaw, but in reality on Nelly herself, her hostess of course being present. He was not quite the same young fellow—to look at—as we knew him in China, because his English tailor had turned him out in the height of the summer fashion. The 'puggaree,' and the open shirt-front, and the linen clothes had vanished; but his manly air and handsome face, from which the 'tan' had only just begun to fade, were as attractive as ever. His manner, naturally so frank, was a little constrained, and at the same time touched with tenderness; for he felt for the poor orphan

girl to whom he had so sad a story to tell of her dead father, and from whom too he had to conceal so much that could not be told.

'It is very good of you, Mr. Milburn, to pay this visit to mere strangers,' said Mrs. Wardlaw with her best 'company manners.'

'Not strangers,' said he gently; 'for I have heard my dear friend Captain Conway speak both of you and your husband; and as to Miss Conway, she of course—' and instead of ending his sentence, he respectfully pressed her hand.

Nelly murmured some words of thanks: she was greatly moved, for here stood one who had seen her father almost at the very last, and could perhaps say something about him which Mr. Pennicuick had left unsaid. It still seemed to her most strange that he should have died without a word of farewell, and she had a vague hope that this man might bring one, or at all events explain that mysterious silence.

'Your father was captain of my company, Miss Conway, and the best friend I had in the regiment, though indeed he was everybody's friend.'

'And you were with him up to the time he left Shanghae on that fatal journey?'

'Oh yes,'—he was going to say, 'and even later,' but stopped short, remembering, with a quick shudder, what that last sight had been. 'Mr. Pennicuick, you know, accompanied him alone; but afterwards, when he returned in hopes to save him, and procure the reprieve that was unhappily useless, I went back with him to Dhulang. That was the name of the pris—the place where your poor father got into trouble.'

'We could never understand that,' said Nelly sadly: 'I mean, how my father, of all men, could have committed——'

'Nor I,' broke in Milburn suddenly, 'nor anybody who knew him. The whole thing was a mystery, and still remains so.'

'Unhappily, however, what happened afterwards was certain enough.'

'Yes.'

Never was monosyllable more fraught with significance.

'You reached Dhulang too late? You never saw him?'

Milburn shook his head. 'He perished before our arrival, thanks to the treachery of the Chinese government. I trust they will still be made to pay for it; but it is so difficult to punish the true transgressors in such cases. Moreover, supposing the facts to be as reported, it was not a *casus belli*.'

'I am sure my poor father would have wished no war to be made on his account,' said Nelly earnestly.

'That is quite true. He was gentleness itself, though as bold as a lion, and had always a keen sense of responsibility. But as for me, when I saw—I mean, when I heard what had taken place, I should have liked to have burnt that temple about its rascally priests' ears, and ——' The young fellow said no more, remembering that he stood in the presence of women, but his flushed cheek and flaming eyes filled up the sentence for him.

'There are some things that make me wish to be a man,' said Mrs. Wardlaw, clenching her fat fists. 'But what I don't understand, and what I think we none of us understand, is the part Mr. Pennicuick took in this unhappy business. Can you tell us about *that*, Mr. Milburn?'

Nelly looked up surprised, and with a little flush; she had no idea that Mrs. Wardlaw concerned herself with Mr. Pennicuick, and if she did so she would have thought her regard for Raymond

would have prevented her from saying anything to his father's prejudice. It was, on the contrary, Mrs. Wardlaw's affection for the young man that made her detest Ralph Pennicuick for his conduct towards him; but to Nelly, just at this time, her remark seemed very *malàpropos*.

'Well, Mrs. Wardlaw,' observed Milburn, in answer to her tone rather than her words, 'I confess I did not like Pennicuick myself. He seemed a cold self-conscious sort of fellow. I never knew him well, however. Of course,' added he, turning to Nelly, 'there must have been something attractive about him, or your father and he could never have been so intimate.'

Nelly bowed her head, not knowing what to say in Mrs. Wardlaw's presence, who was acquainted with poor Mrs. Conway's detestation of the man; and her hostess answered for her.

'Yes, that was a strange thing, for nobody else seems to have had much love for him. He has a son, indeed, who is a very nice young fellow—that is all I have ever heard of nice belonging to him.'

'Indeed! He never spoke to any of us of his having a son.'

'I dare say not,' said Mrs. Wardlaw scornfully. 'He was afraid of being made to look old. He is proud enough, but not proud of the only thing he has really to be proud of.'

'Go it!' observed Mr. Wardlaw cheerfully, and speaking for the first time. 'If you want a man to go dirt cheap, no matter how high his own opinion of himself, let a woman who don't like him put him up to auction.'

'I think you are inclined to be a little hard upon our friend, Mrs. Wardlaw.'

'He is not *my* friend, Mr. Milburn, I do assure you,' interrupted that lady.

'Then I may the more honestly call you hard on him,' observed the young man, smiling, 'since I have a feeling of antagonism against him myself. There was only one thing indeed that I liked about him, but as that very thing was connected with the matter under discussion, I think it in justice ought to be mentioned. As to what happened before the deplorable catastrophe took place I of course know nothing—nobody can know anything—except from his own lips, which can scarcely be expected to speak unfavourably of his own part in the matter; but afterwards, when he and I were at Dhulang, his conduct was more than praiseworthy.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Mrs. Wardlaw, in a tone which unmistakably implied either the reverse of the words she used, or incredulity. 'I should like to hear, however, what Mr. Pennicuick did that was so much to his credit.'

Mr. Milburn did not answer; he was piqued by the speaker's manner, and it was also plainly impossible for him to reply categorically to such a question. Perhaps he would have kept silence on the subject altogether had not Nelly herself said, 'I should like to know, Mr. Milburn, all you can tell me that does not give you pain.'

'I will say, then, Miss Conway, that so far as doing honour to your poor father's memory—which was all that was left for him to do—Mr. Pennicuick spared nothing. It seems a small thing to mention money in such a case, but the man we speak of is not liberal; he had in our regiment, though he had been with us so short a time, rather the character of being the reverse.'

'He has that at home,' observed Mrs. Wardlaw the irrepressible.

'Well, that being the case,' continued the young man, 'it was all the more credit to him that on the occasion I speak of he was more than liberal; he was lavish. The cost of what he did, and he did much, did not seem to affect him at all; while as for his personal feelings of regret—so far as one can judge of such things in another—they were most acute and genuine. I cannot in fact picture a man's performing the last duties to a lost friend with more generosity and devotion.'

'You have taken a great weight from my mind, Mr. Milburn,' said Nelly gravely, 'and I am the more obliged to you since you have shown it was quite misplaced.' There was a little pause, during which Milburn bowed and Mrs. Wardlaw sniffed disapprobation. Then the visitor, perceiving one of Nelly's unfinished drawings on its easel, turned the conversation to that topic. He drew a little himself, it seemed, and was very fond of that occupation. When he rose to go, 'I hope,' said Mrs. Wardlaw, 'that we may have the pleasure of making the acquaintance of your sister.'

'If you would be good enough to call,' answered Mr. Milburn, 'I should deem it a kindness to her.'

Upon the whole, their new acquaintance was felt to be an acquisition. 'I don't think much of the sister,' said Mrs. Wardlaw; 'she looks "stuck up," to my mind, but it is one of the penalties of knowing nice gentlemen that one must needs know their female relatives also.' From which observation it will be gathered that this excellent lady had in that very limited time either got accustomed to her carriage, or had learnt a little of the mode of 'riding the high horse.'

'When one knows nice ladies,' observed Mr. Wardlaw drily,

'I have noticed that it is necessary to introduce them to one's wife, or else there is a row.'

Nelly was deep in thought, and her host forbore to appeal to her, as it was his humour to do, for corroboration of his views. Her late interview had had a melancholy charm for her, and she looked forward with genuine interest to seeing Mr. Milburn again. When she had gone upstairs, Mrs. Wardlaw remarked to her husband that she thought the young people had decidedly taken to one another.

'Your edifice has reached its first story, has it?' said he, laughing.

'Well, why not? Since she has given poor Raymond up, I see no objection to Mr. Milburn.'

'I am glad of it, my dear. I was afraid you would be rather down upon the young gentleman for his advocacy of Mr. Pennicuick.'

'Not at all, John. Mr. Pennicuick's conduct to the dead may be quite irreproachable—I know nothing about that—for you know he didn't think proper to attend poor Mrs. Conway's funeral; all I say is that his behaviour to his fellow-creatures while they are alive is eminently unsatisfactory; and nothing that Mr. Milburn, or anyone else, can ever say to the contrary will alter my opinion.'

'I am quite sure of that, my dear,' observed her husband confidently, and resumed his perusal of the doings at the auction mart in yesterday's 'Times.'

CHAPTER X.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

THE promised call upon Miss Milburn was made that very afternoon; her residence was in the same quarter of the little hotel, and of course under the same roof, so that it became a great question of etiquette with Mrs. Wardlaw whether they should put their bonnets on for the ceremony. After much consideration this was decided in the affirmative, and she and Nelly equipped themselves for out-of-doors, and then sailed down the passage to their port—about four doors off. They found brother and sister both 'at home.' Perhaps the former had remained within in order to receive them, as it was his custom to spend his whole time out-of-doors, whereas Miss Milburn, on the contrary, was rather a hot-house flower. She had more pretensions to good looks than Mrs. Wardlaw had shown herself willing to allow, but by day she looked considerably older than under the gaslight of the *table d'hôte*.

'No chicken, my dear,' was Mrs. Wardlaw's subsequent verdict on her in confidence to Nelly, and she was certainly some years senior to her brother. There was, as has been said, no family resemblance between them, and the contrast of his sunburnt cheeks with her pale and somewhat freckled features, made the dissimilarity even stronger than nature had done. She was straight as a poplar,

and rather of its colour, but not without a certain grace of movement, which seemed however to be studied. Her eyes were grey and very expressive; her voice soft and even musical; her features very clear cut—they were politely called 'classical' by her admirers—but her lips were thin, and she seemed to smile rather to show her excellent teeth than her good nature.

She received her visitors, however, very graciously: indeed, with a greater demonstration than her brother, who seemed more silent and reserved than he had been when he had made his own 'call' that morning. The usual topics were discussed; the climate of Sandybeach: the hotel and its *table d'hôte*; and the scenery.

'My brother tells me you draw, Miss Conway.'

'A little,' answered Nelly modestly.

'Oh dear! I thought you were an artist—indeed, quite a professional.'

'That is very true,' said Nelly, colouring. 'I hope to gain my living by my brush; but at present I am but a beginner.'

Mr. Milburn coloured also till his bronzed cheek grew almost black. But he said nothing.

Mrs. Wardlaw too looked annoyed.

'I hope I have not been indiscreet,' continued Miss Milburn with concern. 'I thought Mr. Wardlaw told you, Herbert——'

'Then he had no business to tell him,' observed Mrs. Wardlaw decisively.

'But why not, my dear Mrs. Wardlaw?' said Nelly, smiling. 'If he did say I hoped to become a professional artist, it was quite true.'

'If you are interested in drawings, Miss Conway, there are

some in this portfolio,' said Mr. Milburn, and Nelly rose and went to it.

Miss Milburn showed her teeth—for the smile she put on did not extend beyond them—and began to talk to Mrs. Wardlaw about her horses (for the new carriage had come down to Sandybeach), which she had seen that morning on the sands and professed to admire exceedingly.

'We should have brought our own down,' she said, 'if we had been certain of the duration of our stay; and then the hills are a consideration. They pull one's horses to pieces—don't you think so?'

'*My* horses are not in pieces,' answered Mrs. Wardlaw.

'Oh, perhaps they are accustomed to a hilly country.'

'Perhaps,' was the unexpected reply; but it was quite true that Mrs. Wardlaw didn't know whether they were or not.

In the mean time Mr. Milburn and Nelly were conversing together in rather a low tone. Not that they had any secrets, but that the common topic between them—Captain Conway's death—was so sad and serious a one. And the sketches he was showing her he had taken in China.

He did not draw well, and he knew it, but he had sufficient skill both with brush and pencil to make a picture that should reproduce any scene he had beheld with his own eyes, and even to give a tolerable idea of it to others.

'They are very inferior to your poor father's handiwork,' said he. 'I have one of them here.'

And he placed in her hand a little sketch of the neighbourhood near Shanghae.

'That is as like as life,' said he. 'And it has a peculiar value for

me since it was the last he did previous to his departure on his ill-fated journey.'

Nelly regarded it with intense interest, and could hardly restrain her tears.

'You have many of his paintings no doubt,' he went on, 'and this is but a slight example of his skill.'

'I have one or two of his sketches,' said Nelly, in tones whose quiet calmness cost her something; 'but he sent us very few from China.'

'Then these even from my 'prentice hand may interest you. I will send the portfolio to No. 8—that is your sitting-room, I think? Then you can look them over at your leisure.'

'I should like to do so exceedingly.'

'You will find the names at the back of each, so that you may identify the scenes, in case your father may have mentioned them in his letters.'

His manner was very kind, but it had a certain stiffness about it, which was perhaps the result of his military training. Soldiers are generally reserved, unless they are very much the reverse, when they are not pleasant. Being 'in the army' is, as to manners, like being in a refrigerator. Nelly knew very few young men, and only one at all intimately. Raymond was a great contrast to Milburn, impulsive, frank, and demonstrative. It was an inexpressible comfort to her that this man was otherwise; or she could not have discoursed with him upon the painful subject, with which all he said was more or less connected, with such comparative self-control. He told her how popular her father had been with all who knew him; how kindly was his character, though at the same time so shrewd; how quietly he lived, and yet without a

suspicion of the 'closeness' attributed to his friend Pennicuick; how everyone thought Captain Conway could have done anything he liked but for a certain indolence, which the young man termed modesty.

So intent were they in conversation that Mrs. Wardlaw had already observed, 'Well, my dear, I think we must be going for our drive,' without attracting their attention. On the repetition of the remark, however, Nelly rose, with a little blush, and an apology founded on the interest of the sketches. 'Mr. Milburn has been so good as to say he will send us over his portfolio that we may examine its contents at leisure.'

'That's very good of him,' said Mrs. Wardlaw; 'but why trouble him to send it? It is not a large one, and we can take it back with us now.'

'I had rather send it,' said Mr. Milburn quickly.

'You can bring it yourself, if you please,' answered Mrs. Wardlaw; 'we shall always be glad to see you.'

The young man murmured his thanks. His sister said a little stiffly, 'We shall certainly take an early opportunity of returning your call.'

'Well, Nelly, and what do you think of our new friend?' inquired Mrs. Wardlaw, as soon as they were seated in the carriage.

'I like Mr. Milburn very much; indeed, I have seldom liked anyone so much on a first acquaintance.'

'That is bad,' thought the old lady to herself. 'If she was really smitten, she would not be so enthusiastic.'

'On the other hand,' added Nelly, 'it must be considered that first acquaintances have rarely anything in common, as in the present case. He talked of dear papa so very, very nicely.'

'Of course he did; he was a very different sort of friend to him, depend upon it, than that Mr. Pennicuick.'

'Then he knew all about China, and that of course was interesting to me who know so little about it. In poor papa's boxes there was scarcely a single sketch made in that country, whereas he gave one to Mr. Milburn—such a charming little thing—only a few weeks before—before his end.'

'I dare say he'd give it you if you asked him.'

'That is quite out of the question,' answered Nelly decisively. 'He seemed to value it almost as much as I should do if it were mine; it seems papa was always working with his pencil, though he thought little of the value of what he did, and would give his sketches away to anyone who took a fancy to them. Only what astonished Mr. Milburn was that among his other things we should have found no sketches taken—quite at last—during that unhappy journey. He could not have given *them* away, you see; and he would be sure to have made several before he fell into the hands of those wretches.'

'If he did, where are they?'

'Perhaps Mr. Pennicuick has sold them,' suggested Mrs. Wardlaw.

'Oh, for shame, my dear friend! I am sure you cannot say that seriously.'

'I only said "perhaps," my dear. Anything is possible, in my humble opinion, with respect to that man.'

The reason of which extreme antagonism might be thus explained: she had disliked Mr. Pennicuick, to begin with, and all that Mrs. Conway had said to her against him had a double force now that she was dead; she had especially disliked him for his

treatment of her favourite Raymond; and when he set himself, as she knew he had, against his son's marrying her beloved Nelly, she absolutely loathed him. It was true that she herself had now other views for the girl, but they had been necessitated by Ralph Pennicuick's conduct, and in carrying them out her conscience pricked her, on Raymond's account, and made his father more detestable to her even than before.

'I don't like to hear you say such things,' said Nelly, 'when the facts, as we have just heard from Mr. Milburn, not only do not warrant them, but all point the other way.'

'I know if your poor mother was alive she would hold the same view of him that I do.'

This was a strategic stroke, but hardly a fair one; the proper answer was that Mrs. Conway had hugged her prejudices as though they had been her children, notwithstanding that some of them were quite grown up (this one against Ralph Pennicuick, for example, had been born before Nelly was); but of course Nelly was precluded from this reply.

After a short pause, she said, 'And what do you think of Miss Milburn?'

'Well, my dear Nelly, at the risk of being thought uncharitable twice in one day, I must confess that I don't like her. Perhaps it is that my intimacy with your dear self of late has placed all other young women at a disadvantage in my eyes—I never pay compliments, my darling; it is the sober truth—I say perhaps I have unconsciously contrasted this lady with yourself, and she has suffered accordingly: but certainly she has fallen far short of my expectations, which were founded of course on what we had seen of her brother. I think she is pretentious; proud of her money—or

rather of her brother's money, for it seems it is all his—and desperately alarmed lest anybody else should get hold of it.'

'How clever you must have been, my dear Mrs. Wardlaw,' laughed Nelly, 'to find all that out in ten minutes! She must have been very candid and communicative.'

'She was neither, my dear; nor am I clever, as you very well know. But she held her hand a little too low, and—as I can never help doing when John and I play at cribbage together—I looked over it.'

'That was very wrong,' said Nelly, much amused at this confession.

'Well, if one has eyes, one must use them. It is money that has brought these two together. I don't believe she cared twopence about her brother till he became rich; and she only cares for him now because he is so. Her whole object in life is to keep him—that is, his money—to herself.'

'But who on earth is going to rob her of him—or it?' inquired Nelly.

'Well, she suspects everybody, no doubt, but just at present *you*.'

'Me?'

'Certainly. You are young and pretty; and she thinks (and she is doubtless right) that her brother admires you. She wishes you were at York, or still better at Jericho; anywhere else, in short, than at Sandybeach, under the same roof with him; you should have seen her green eyes——'

'They are grey,' put in Nelly quietly.

'They are green when she is jealous, and it was with jealous eyes that she kept watch over you and him (out of the corners of

them) the whole time she was talking with me. You heard her rude remarks about your being an artist by trade.'

'I don't think she meant any rudeness, Mrs. Wardlaw.'

'She did; but that was not her chief object: she made that speech for her brother's benefit, and her intention was to point out to all concerned that you were very poor, and consequently not to be thought of seriously by a young man of his fortune.'

'My dear Mrs. Wardlaw, you make me very uncomfortable by talking of such things, which I am sure have no existence save in your own mind. It is your affection for me, I know, which prompts you to believe I am of such importance—or indeed of any importance—to other people; but you are not only doing Miss Milburn wrong, but giving me pain.'

'Then I am a brute beast, my darling, and will be dumb accordingly.'

'But I like to hear you talk, dear Mrs. Wardlaw, if you only won't suppose that every young man wants to marry me.'

'Now there! I never said they did—though of course they do: I only said that Miss Milburn thought so. Well, then, to drop that subject (though it was *the* thing she had in her mind, for all that) she told me that "dear Herbert" was in doubt about returning to China or not. Of course he had a great position in this country, but on the other hand it was so necessary for a young man to have some occupation: being in the army kept a man out of harm's way. It doesn't, my dear, as you, alas! have good cause to know; but what she meant was that, out in China, it is likely "dear Herbert" will remain single, or perhaps succumb to the climate.'

'It strikes me, my dear Mrs. Wardlaw,' said Nelly, laughing.

'that you have succumbed to the Sandybeach climate, and are getting a little—shall I venture to say—"gritty"?'

'If you will have it so, my dear. The sand gets everywhere, and perhaps has penetrated the—what do you call it?—the spleen.'

The two ladies had a hearty laugh, which is not only the best deodoriser for all unwholesome 'breezes' between friends, but where there has been no breeze, and only an unpleasantry in the way of allusion to a delicate topic, disperses the little clouds and makes all blue again. Only—to use a very common phrase for a thing that affects everybody, whether common or otherwise—by 'putting it into' Nelly's 'head' that Miss Milburn was afraid of her brother falling in love with her, Mrs. Wardlaw had made her very uncomfortable, and quite destroyed the pleasure that she had derived from that young gentleman's acquaintance. Nor was her embarrassment diminished when, on coming home from her drive, she found in No. 8, not only the promised portfolio, but something in paper directed to herself, 'with Mr. Milburn's compliments' outside it, that turned out to be her father's sketch, and which of course he had thus sent her as a present.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO SKETCHES.

It was a satisfaction to Nelly to find that, after they had parted from their new acquaintances, Mr. Milburn had received a letter by the afternoon post which necessitated his immediate presence in London; since his absence gave her time to consider whether she ought to accept his proffered gift. He had said that he highly prized her father's sketch, but his good feeling might very easily suggest that the daughter of his dead friend would prize it more; and it really seemed ungracious to refuse it. It was no ordinary case of a complimentary present which could be declined or otherwise without any show of feeling. Had it not been for Mrs. Wardlaw's remarks, she would have had no doubt upon the matter; she would have accepted the picture in the same kindly, reverent spirit in which (she felt sure) it had been offered her, and also, of course, with genuine gratitude. Even now she had not been grievously disturbed by her friend's view of her relation to Mr. Milburn in his sister's eyes; but it had certainly embarrassed her.

In the mean time, since Miss Milburn was alone, the Wardlaws sent a polite message to ask her to join their party at the *table d'hôte*, which of course included an invitation for the rest of the

evening. 'Civility costs nothing,' was Mrs. Wardlaw's confidential remark to Nelly, 'and you may depend upon it she won't come.'

Much to that lady's confusion, however, she did come, and with that evident intention of making herself agreeable which is so overwhelming. Moreover, she affected an air of self-depreciation with which not the most consummate tact can deal. It was *so* kind of them to take compassion upon a deserted creature like herself, who had no accomplishments to repay them for their welcome, and who had no claim upon their hospitality whatever!'

Mr. Wardlaw thought she alluded to the expenses they might be put to in her entertainment, and hastened to explain that all they had in the evening was a sort of tea-cake procured in the village by his 'Missus' (as he familiarly termed Mrs. Wardlaw) at a very reasonable rate.

'Oh no,' answered Miss Milburn in correction of this error, 'it is not the cost that I refer to, but the kindness: one does not judge a thing by its mere *worth*, you know.'

Mr. Wardlaw shook his head; he felt that he and his guest had some different standard of value for things, but did his best to agree with her by saying 'No, no, it's what things will *fetch*, isn't it, miss?' Perceiving that he had made a mistake again, he hastened to express his admiration for a certain diamond ring of ancient workmanship she wore, of the value of which under the hammer he had already made an approximate estimate in his own mind.

'It was one of Herbert's gifts,' she said, 'when he came into his property.' It had been a sort of heirloom in the family for centuries, but nevertheless he had insisted upon her taking possession of it. She had replied, 'Only as a loan, Herbert; when you bring

home your bride to the Old Hall, this ring shall have its proper place upon her finger.'

'I shouldn't give it up in a hurry if I were you,' observed Mr. Wardlaw practically.

'Indeed,' returned she, 'providing it be a fitting recipient—one who has been used by birth and fortune to wear such ornaments—nothing would give me greater pleasure.'

'You don't say so!' said Mr. Wardlaw innocently: 'now, my view would be just the contrary. If I were in your case, and my brother married a rich wife, I should say to myself, "Well, she's got plenty of rings, and don't want this one;" but if she was a poor girl, then it would be very pleasant to give her such a ring as that, to be the first perhaps she had ever worn.'

'I am afraid our views upon such a subject are not likely to assimilate,' said Miss Milburn stiffly: after which he felt equal to no more conversation with her until after his second glass of champagne.

To the ladies Miss Milburn was very confidential: she informed them that 'dear Herbert' was worried to death by lawyers, who had dragged him up to town that very day on matters connected with 'the estate.' He hated business, and she feared he was often imposed upon; his nature was so frank and cordial that he was really no match for anybody that was at all designing. 'I feel as angry with people that endeavour to get the better of him in any way, as though they were taking advantage of a child.'

'He is a very fine child,' observed Mrs. Wardlaw.

Miss Milburn glanced at her with her keen grey eye, but could not quite make out whether she was in jest or earnest.

'Yes, Herbert is very handsome. That is an additional source

of anxiety to me; for more than once—even in the few weeks since he has been at home—he has attracted—girls will be girls, you know—a little too much admiration from young ladies, and that without the least "design" on their parts: they did not know he was rich, or their good feeling would have prevented them giving way to such weakness; and they learnt it too late I fear for their peace of mind.'

'I hope they did not die?' observed Mrs. Wardlaw innocently. The concern expressed in her good-natured face was once more too much for her new acquaintance, who could not of course understand that she had taken unwonted refuge in sarcasm from anger upon Nelly's account, for whose benefit she felt certain that these anecdotes were narrated.

'I did not mean to say that it had any such serious effect,' explained Miss Milburn, 'but the whole affair was unfortunate! On the one side there was a sense of humiliation—if nothing deeper—and on the other—well, of course Herbert was sorry, although he had nothing to reproach himself with.'

'How much has he a year?' inquired Mrs. Wardlaw simply.

'Well, really,' said Miss Milburn, 'that is rather a home-question. His estate is in land, and therefore cannot be estimated by its mere worth.'

'There she is again,' murmured Mr. Wardlaw to himself. 'I wonder how she does calculate things?'

Perhaps he could not help expressing this curiosity in his countenance, for Miss Milburn added, 'What I mean is, that the social position of a great landholder is not to be measured by his rent-roll. People in commerce, for example, may have a larger income, and yet be in every way inferior.'

'But what *is* his rent-roll?' inquired Mrs. Wardlaw, with innocent importunity.

'I suppose it is not less than four thousand a year,' replied Miss Milburn.

'Well, then, you ought to ticket him: "To young ladies and others: To prevent disappointment, it is hereby notified that this attractive gentleman is possessed of three or four thousand a year in land." Don't you think that would be a good plan?'

Then Miss Milburn perceived that she had been going a little too far in her Notice to Trespassers, and vouchsafed a smile. Not that she was amused by the pleasantry, but she felt that, if she took any offence at it, her brother would come to hear of the matter.

'I dare say, Mrs. Wardlaw, you think me foolishly fond of Herbert, and that I imagine every young woman is setting her cap at him—but then, you know, he has only me to look to, and I feel *such* a sense of responsibility!'

Nelly fortunately did not overhear much of this talk which took place at the *table d'hôte*, where she sat by Mr. Wardlaw on the side remote from the other two ladies, but she had a general impression that Mrs. Wardlaw and her guest were not 'getting on' very well together. After dinner Miss Milburn was particularly gracious to Nelly, either with a view of removing any bad impression she might have made, or to show that she had really no sort of prejudice against that young person, if only she showed no signs of a wicked ambition: but it could not be said to be a successful evening.

The next day, Mr. Milburn being still in town, his sister was

again invited to join the little Wardlaw circle, but declined upon the plea of indisposition—which in one sense at least was doubtless a genuine one. It was not likely that she could have taken to Mrs. Wardlaw kindly, who, though a most good-natured and long-suffering woman, and hardly to be moved to anger on her own account—as indeed she had proved in her relations with poor Mrs. Conway—had resented so decidedly the hints that Miss Milburn had thrown out for Nelly's guidance.

On the fourth day 'dear Herbert' returned, and the intercourse between the two families was renewed. They met out of doors, and as they sauntered together upon the sands the young man attached himself to Nelly's side, which gave her some annoyance, but at the same time afforded her an opportunity of thanking him for his present. 'Of course I value it very highly,' she said, 'but for that very reason I feel that I ought not to rob you of it.'

'Nay,' said he gently, 'it is a question of a little loss on the one side, and of a great gain on the other: even a political economist would decide in your favour. I am very glad to have been able to give you the sketch. By the by,' added he, in a lighter tone, 'I have seen Mrs. Wardlaw's favourite, Mr. Pennicuick, in London.'

'Indeed!' answered Nelly quietly: but her heart was beating painfully while she spoke. She never doubted that by 'Mrs. Wardlaw's favourite' Mr. Milburn had meant Raymond; she had thought of him many times since he had turned so sadly from her and hurried away with drooping head over the sands, and wondered how matters were with him.

'I thought I ought to call, you know,' continued Milburn, 'especially as I had heard that he was ill; so I looked him up in

the Albany. At first he seemed anything but glad to see me—looked as scared at me as if I had been a ghost—but presently he became almost cordial. I don't think he likes anything that reminds him of his Chinese experiences, which indeed is natural enough, and does him credit. He seems to me by no means so black as he is painted, though perhaps—if I may be allowed to say so—that might be partly owing to the very high terms in which he spoke of a certain Miss Conway.'

'Mr. Pennicuick has been always very civil to *me*,' observed Nelly, smiling; her relief at finding that it was the elder Pennicuick who was the subject of her companion's talk, preventing her taking much notice of his compliment, though it was uttered with some significance.

'Oh, but he was much more than civil, Miss Conway. If he had been your own—that is, your guardian—he could not have said prettier things; our sentiments coincided so perfectly that he asked me to dinner the next day.'

'He must be coming out of his shell indeed,' observed Nelly; 'we understood that he had become quite a recluse.'

'Well, I don't know about that; but he is going into Parliament, perhaps upon the "Recluse" interest, for he didn't seem to have any particular views on Politics. Now, I should have thought a man of that kind would have been an out-and-out, no-compromise, church-and-king old Tory.'

'By which I suppose I may gather,' answered Nelly slily, 'that the politics of Mr. Herbert Milburn are common-sense, progressive, broad, and Liberal.'

'Well, they are something like that, I believe,' answered Milburn, laughing. 'I forgot that your poor father's views were

True Blue, and you have no doubt inherited his opinions. However, I am very amenable to what the electioneering people call "influence," and if you will undertake to show me the error of my ways, I don't doubt you will make a convert.'

'I should not like to hold my opinions—whatever they are—quite so loosely as you seem to do, Mr. Milburn,' answered Nelly gravely.

Oh, excuse me,' answered the young man earnestly; 'I only meant that I had not given much attention to Politics, and took no decided line; and under these circumstances, you know, when a person for whom one has a great respect comes to talk to one, of course he—that is, that person—exercises a considerable effect. But in the case of Mr. Pennicuick, it did seem strange to me that he should seriously contemplate going into Parliament, without even caring on which side he sits.'

'Did he really say that?' inquired Nelly.

'Well, yes, he did. Of course we should not take the words of a man of the world, such as Mr. Pennicuick, quite literally: but it made me laugh to hear him talk. "I want an object in life," he said; "and though to sit for a borough is rather an expensive object, it is cheaper than some others, such as horse-racing, for example, and it also suits me better. As for Whig and Tory, the difference between them is merely that between Tweedledum and Tweedledee."'

'I don't think you should have told me this, Mr. Milburn, if you wanted me to plume myself on the good opinion of me this gentleman was good enough to express.'

'Well, perhaps not: but then you are not likely to "plume yourself," as you term it, upon any such thing. I should think

you were a sort of person who would always do what was right without much regard for the opinion of the Mr. Pennicuicks. And, by the by, that reminds me that I saw Mr. Pennicuick's son at his father's table; you are acquainted with him, of course?'

'We know him very well,' answered Nelly quietly, for she was quite prepared this time for any allusion to Raymond. 'He is a great favourite—a real one—of Mrs. Wardlaw's.'

'Do I understand you to imply, and not of yours?' inquired the other lightly.

'Certainly not. I have a great regard for him: we were brought up together almost like brother and sister.'

'Indeed! I should never have guessed that, since he did not speak of you. To be sure he had doubtless heard all about you that I could tell from his father. And besides he was very reticent; hardly spoke a word.'

'He was well, I hope?' said Nelly, conscious of her rising colour, and unable, as it seemed to her, to speak with the indifference she intended.

'Oh yes, he seemed well enough; but if it is not his nature to be silent, he must have been out of spirits. It struck me that the father and son did not hit it off together quite comfortably.'

'Raymond is not a man to quarrel with his father,' said Nelly gravely. She resented her companion's light way of talking of him, and of that sorrow which she understood so well. 'You talked just now of duty; he is the most dutiful man I know.'

'No doubt he is a good fellow,' said Milburn hastily; 'and indeed, since you say so, it must be so. I have not a word to say against him. I did not mean that he and his father quarrelled,

only it seemed to me that there had been some recent misunderstanding between them—in fact what, in ignorance of his being such a good young man, I might have profanely called "a row,"—and that the son had had to give in, but as it were under protest. It was perhaps about money matters, and in that case the old fellow was the one in fault, no doubt; for we all know he is a screw. That reminds me of something that I wished to tell you. Mr. Pennicuick, as I have said, was not a screw in connection with one matter, nor indeed as respects anything that occurred at Dhulang. I dare say you wondered why I would not let you have that portfolio at the time when you were so good as to call on us, and that I insisted on sending it later to your room. The reason was, that it contained two sketches which, if you had come upon them unexpectedly, would have caused you pain.'

'That was very kind and thoughtful of you,' said Nelly gratefully.

'Nay, it would have been very thoughtless had I not taken the precaution. The fact is that, while at Dhulang, though my visit was very short, I drew a sketch of the Mandarin's house from which your poor father was committed to the prison. But I am afraid'—for she had turned pale—'I am doing the very thing I would have avoided—giving you the heartache.'

'No; it was just for the minute. I should like to see the sketch.'

'You shall not only see it, but possess it. It is not worth your thanks, for since it is my own handiwork, it is not—like the other—of any intrinsic value.'

'I shall value it nevertheless,' answered Nelly simply, 'upon

that very account. I should think of the kindness of the donor, whenever I look at it.'

'Your words make me very happy,' answered the young man earnestly. 'The other sketch will speak for itself. It is——'

'O Herbert dear, do pray come and tell us about this starfish,' broke in Miss Milburn; 'it is quite different from the common ones, and Mrs. Wardlaw is dying to know about it.'

If Mrs. Wardlaw's decease had depended solely upon her curiosity remaining unsatisfied upon any point of science whatever, whether ichthyological or otherwise, it is probable she would have lived for many hundreds of years; but as a pretext to cut short the conversation between the two young people, Miss Milburn's speech fulfilled its intention. They had no further chance for private talk that day, and Milburn secretly congratulated himself that he had not wasted his time while the opportunity lasted. His sister's suspicions, though she would have probably entertained them had Nelly been infinitely less attractive, were in her case well-founded; 'dear Herbert' was really smitten by 'that Miss Conway,' and much more seriously than his self-constituted guardian and protectress imagined. He had left her with very great reluctance for his two days' business in town, and as it happened she had been there the topic of Mr. Pennicuick's talk. Of course Milburn did not need any corroboration of the view he had taken of her character, but somehow the eulogies he had heard from his host's lips had increased his own admiration of their object. He had no respect for Ralph Pennicuick's opinions, as we have seen; but still, when he found so acute and experienced a man of the world speaking in such high terms, not only of a girl's grace and beauty, but of her talents and good sense, it had not been without

its effect upon him. He could not know that every word the other said had been spoken with a purpose, namely, to urge Milburn on to offer himself as her lover, and thereby, as he trusted, to extinguish the dying embers of Raymond's hopes at once and for ever.

As to Nelly, she was quite unconscious of Mr. Milburn's feelings towards her, notwithstanding his sister's warnings. She liked him exceedingly, but her liking was due to his relations with her father, and to the evident regard he had entertained for him, quite as much as to his own attractions. If he had had those alone to recommend him, he would have found her—doubly oppressed as she was by her recent loss, and by her renunciation of Raymond—very difficult of approach and anything but demonstrative. Even as it was, his presence, though agreeable to her, rather increased her melancholy than otherwise, by perpetually reminding her of her father.

The chief interest attaching to the young man in her eyes was that he had gone to Dhulang and been one of the three Englishmen who had seen their dead comrade laid in his grave. The promised sketches were brought to her that afternoon, while she happened to be alone, and she had carried them up to her own room without even mentioning their arrival to her hostess.

Her curiosity respecting them was overpowered by a deeper and more solemn feeling, and she did not open the little packet till she retired for the night. The evening had been very still, and nothing was then heard but the gentle kiss of the wave, or its sigh as it withdrew from the yielding sand; the sky was black and starless, and the quiet and the darkness renewed that sense of solitariness from which she had of late been slowly emerging.

She felt again how lonely her life was doomed to be, and her thoughts did not need the association which Mr. Milburn's gift must needs possess to turn them to those who had departed and left her thus alone. Did her father see her now, she wondered, and was he conscious how great a void his death had made for her, and how she yearned to join him in the land of shades? She sat down with a certain sense of expectation, but also with one of weariness and woe that dulled its edge, and opened the packet. The first sketch depicted the house of Twang-hi, the Mandarin, taken from the garden where we saw poor Conway and his companion—the former so unconscious of coming trouble—on the morning after their visit to the Temple. It was a bright and cheerful scene, with the light of summer shining upon the velvet lawn and the gilded pinnacles of the Joss-house, with its flowing lines of roof and tiny balconies. It was difficult to imagine that those gay and glittering gates could have been the portals of death—and such a death! If Nelly imagined that this very contrast gave her greater pain, she found out her mistake when her eyes rested on the second sketch, which, as Milburn had said, spoke for itself. It had been apparently taken by moonlight, and represented an abrupt hill thickly covered with pine-trees. The whole scene was black and gloomy to an extreme degree, save the Lamp of Night in the heavens and one white spot on some level ground at the foot of the hill—which was a tomb-stone.

Nelly understood at once that she was looking on her father's grave.

'She was looking on her father's grave.'

CHAPTER XII.

AN OBJECT IN LIFE.

WHETHER Ralph Pennicuick did or did not exaggerate his own cynicism respecting political matters in his talk with Milburn, he was quite in earnest about going into Parliament. The 'object in life' of which he spoke had really become necessary to him, though hitherto he had made it his boast that he was able to get on without any such thing. He had been asked more than once how it was that he contrived to pass his aimless existence with such apparent ease and self-satisfaction, and his answer had always been 'Because I understand myself.' He had studied his own wants (or rather wishes), his tastes, his characteristics, just as a man of science studies the Fauna or the Flora of some particular clime, and had thus acquired a perfect knowledge of himself: if this was not the 'know thyself' of the philosopher, it was a good practical guide, and had at least made him certain of what he liked, which is a great step in the direction which he considered to be the right one.

He flattered himself, because he was vicious without being actually depraved, that he had in his pleasures hit the golden mean: he did not trouble himself with study, but he read not only those French novels, more numerous than select, which form the chief

literary pabulum of men of his stamp (as well as of many others who ought to know better), but also such books as dealt with the thoughtful questions of the time; if these did not do him the benefit their authors (if we are to believe their prefaces) intended, they kept him abreast, and—assisted by his natural cleverness—even ahead, of most minds with which he was brought into contact. It was pleasant to him to hear it said that 'that fellow Pennicuick, idle as he was, knew as much as any of your reading men,' and there was also some solid advantage to be got out of it. When one goes to Rome, for example, nine-tenths of the enjoyment of the visit is lost without a little scholarship, and to lose enjoyment annoyed Pennicuick almost as much as to have lost a day pained the tender conscience of Titus. He was a good sportsman, without ever becoming the slave of horse, or dog, or gun, and, in a word, had taken just so much of interest in most things as made his time pass agreeably wherever he was.

But now things had altered with him altogether; small matters could no longer win his mind from what he termed his 'morbid thoughts,' but which was in truth remorse and self-reproach. He felt for the first time the want not so much of an object in life as (very literally) a diversion, and he was not the man to long deny himself his desire. Circumstances indeed had made it absolutely necessary that he should obtain it quickly as a relief from worries of all sorts. Not only was there the central trouble, which he had fondly hoped Nelly's acceptance or rejection of the proffered annuity would set at rest, haunting him day and night with grim persistence, but his relations with Raymond were most annoying. He could certainly not be said to be a devoted father; it had perhaps been part of his admirable scheme of life not to bestow

his affections anywhere for fear he should be made to suffer through them; but he had doubtless some vulgar natural liking for his only son, and in his present nervous and depressed condition he keenly felt (though he would have scorned to acknowledge it) the need of human sympathy. It was therefore highly disagreeable to him that none was forthcoming. Raymond was dutiful still, solicitous for his comfort, and always at his beck and call, but his manner plainly showed that he had been hardly used and could not forget it. Directly he had become acquainted with the fact that he had an independence of his own, he had, as we have seen, gone at once to Nelly, and asked her to become his wife; but in accordance with his promise to Mr. Tatham he had said nothing of his having acquired this knowledge to his father, nor of course of the action that he had taken on becoming possessed of it. The melancholy that had seized him since his rejection by Nelly was therefore set down by Ralph Pennicuick as caused by his own opposition to the match, which indeed in the main it was; and his fear was that, when his son should come into his mother's money, he would do the very thing which in fact he had done, only with the opposite result; that is to say, that Nelly, trusting to his own eventual forgiveness, or perhaps rendered careless of it by her passion, might accept his son's love and marry him out of hand. He had therefore used every argument to Herbert Milburn to induce him to prevent this catastrophe by marrying the girl himself. As time went on, and Raymond in due course came into his slender inheritance, it was no small relief to his father that he did not take the course thus apprehended; and to reward him for it—though he was careful not to say so—he informed him that for the future his allowance would be continued to him notwithstanding

that he had now an equal income of his own. 'You may have wondered, my lad, why I have never told you of the existence of the little independence that has become your own; the reason was, not that I desired to keep you in leading-strings, but that I wished you to practise economy and self-restraint, since an exaggerated view of what would probably be yours some day—and certainly will be if you continue to please me—might lead you into habits of extravagance. But now that you have shown you are a sensible fellow, and know the value of money, I have great pleasure in making you easy in your circumstances: you will henceforward have six hundred a year to spend instead of three hundred.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Raymond (never did the expression of gratitude have less of cordiality in it). 'I think, however, it is but right that you should know all, before bestowing your generosity upon what you may consider an unworthy object.'

'Know all?' exclaimed the other, once more alarmed lest his son should have set him at nought by a secret marriage; 'you have done nothing, I hope, that you are ashamed of.'

'No, sir: though I would have done something, if I could, of which you would not have approved.'

Raymond had never felt so galled, antagonistic, and (albeit he had nothing now to fear) so defiant. His father's words had sounded very unpleasantly to him. The reason he had given for his silence about his mother's money was, he felt, a false one; he had been kept in ignorance of it for the very cause which the other had disclaimed, namely, that he might be kept in leading-strings. The allusion to his father's fortune was also false; instead of taking an exaggerated view of it, Ralph Pennicuick must have known that his son had believed it to be much less than it really was. The

threat implied in the phrase 'if you continue to please me' was offensive to the young man; and, above all, the sense that his father's objection to his marriage had proved an insurmountable bar to Nelly's acceptance of him, made him very grave and grim.

Ralph Pennicuick's mind leaped at once to the truth, so far as the girl was concerned.

'If nothing has been done amiss, Raymond,' said he quietly, 'you may trust to my forgiveness of the intention, since I conclude that it no longer exists.'

'But it does exist, sir, and it always will exist,' answered the young man quickly. 'The first use I made of the discovery of my independence was to ask Miss Conway to become my wife.'

'I had an idea that when we last talked upon this subject, Raymond, that course of action was barred.'

'No, sir: it was agreed that I should not damage the young lady's prospects, as regarded your proffered aid, by urging my suit: but since she refused your bounty, she could be no longer harmed by acting counter to your wishes. I proposed therefore to marry her, and would have done so; I would marry her to-morrow if she would have me.'

'You are very frank, I must say. Well, the young lady, it seems, rejected you.'

'Miss Conway, I am sorry to say, refused to be my wife, upon the ground that it would cause a breach between yourself and me, and prejudice my future prospects.'

'She took a very correct view of what would have happened, my good lad,' said Ralph Pennicuick coolly, 'and exhibited an amount of common sense that is rare indeed in women.'

'I beg, sir, that you will not make light of what is the gravest calamity of my life,' said Raymond warmly. 'I cannot—nay, I will not—bear it.'

'Oh, I see,' observed the other in his most cynical tones. 'You are seeking a quarrel. You wish me to say, "Go to the devil," and then you would go to this excellent and high-principled young woman and say, "My wicked father has cast me off: the breach between us is made; my future prospects are ruined, and therefore we might just as well be man and wife." The plan does infinite credit to your sagacity, but I am not quite certain that, with respect to morals and filial feeling, it is quite so worthy of praise.'

'So help me Heaven, sir, such an idea never entered into my mind!' exclaimed Raymond. 'I should have thought it shameful to entertain it. My motive was merely to avoid partaking of your bounty under false pretences. I disobeyed you in my heart, and I do so still, and I think it right that you should know it.'

'Well, well, we cannot always control our wishes, my lad,' returned the other quietly, 'even when they are in opposition to our best interests and to those who have the right to choose for us. I freely forgive your deviation from the path of filial duty, and I hope—' he hesitated; it would have seemed impossible to Ralph Pennicuick, a few months ago, that he should have made such an appeal to any man, much less to his own son, but he did make it—'I hope you will forgive *me* for being what now doubtless seems to you an obstacle to your happiness, but in reality——'

'I forgive you, sir, so far as it is possible,' put in Raymond hastily; 'I will try to think you are acting for the best; but pray let us drop the subject.'

The fruits of victory of course remained with the elder Penni-

cuick, but he by no means felt master of the field. His son, it was plain, was no longer in his power, since a threat of disinheritance would be welcome to him; and indeed he owed his obedience, not, it seemed, to filial respect, but to the view which Nelly had happened to take upon the matter. It may be thought, perhaps, that another bitter reflection would have occurred to him, namely, that, should he die, the young people would speedily console themselves for his departure; but the fact was that, notwithstanding he knew that his health was failing, and that rapidly, he shut Death out from view—for a particular reason. It was not terrible to him upon theological grounds; for before we fear God, we must at least believe in His existence; but he shrank from the contemplation of it, because it was just possible that, on the other side of the grave, he might be brought face to face with Arthur Conway. It may be asked, if this was the case, why did he not make haste to reconcile himself with him as far as possible, by reparation and atonement? The same question may be put concerning most men. Their time is short: eternity is long. They must surely be mad to procrastinate. And yet, as a general rule, they do not hurry themselves to make amends. 'There are so many things to be considered.'

It was necessary for Ralph Pennicuick to live most resolutely in the Present, forgetting the Past and ignoring the Future, and, since he was always careful not to live for others, to get some *thing* to live for. And this thing had resolved itself into a seat in Parliament. It is not rare in England for a man in middle life, who has all things comfortable about him, and no inward call whatever towards politics, to entertain this ambition; to spend money without stint for the privilege of sitting in the council-chamber of the

nation until the small hours, to hear speeches made that have no sort of interest for him: but in Ralph Pennicuick's case his avowed intention to take this course did arouse no little surprise. For in the days when it was said of him that he could do anything he liked, and when it had not as yet been discovered that he liked to do nothing, a political career had been prophesied for him; nay, had been even offered to him, and declined. And now that he was getting on in years, it seemed strange enough that he should thus reconsider that matter. He had an answer, we may be sure, for all who expressed their surprise at it: for he was bright and keen as ever, out-of-doors; as much respected (when present) in the club smoking-room; and as much a leading figure in certain social circles of consideration, as of yore. He was not always cowering over his autumn fire in his rooms at the Albany, alone save for the spectres of the Dead, and the company of a certain familiar spirit, who was growing every day more familiar than welcome to him.

He went about his electioneering, too, in a practical common-sense way; not in asking vague questions here and there, or 'putting himself into communication' with those political committees about which we hear so much, and of the work of which we see so little, for a very sufficient reason—namely, that they do none. On the contrary, he applied in person for the thing he wanted to Mr. Gustavus Pierrepoint.

Mr. Pierrepoint was not a 'creature' of any party, nor even a wire-puller, except so far as his own private machinery was concerned, in connection with the body politic; but he had turned his attention to electioneering just as other men turn theirs to science or philosophy; only the result of *his* studies was that he knew much more about the matter in question, for certain, than

they did; and moreover he made his living by it. He took a very material, almost a mechanical, view of his calling. In his snug apartment in Gray's Inn he had a map of England laid out—though it was always kept rolled up—upon quite a peculiar system. It was divided into electoral districts coloured like a geological chart, only the strata signified political opinions: they were denoted by the most various shades of blue and yellow, from indigo to orange, while here and there (in a good many places) were very cheerful spots of scarlet, which meant, I am sorry to say, 'these seats generally go to the highest bidder.'

There was a certain borough in the Midland Counties, called Slowcomb, which wore a very roseate hue indeed on this tell-tale map, and it was about Slowcomb that Mr. Ralph Pennicuick called one morning in Gray's Inn—after a little previous correspondence—to have some professional talk with Mr. Pierrepoint. The subject divided itself, like a sermon, into several heads, only (which is not the case with sermons, which generally keep their 'gallop for the avenue') the most important was the first brought under notice. This was of course 'the figure.'

Mr. Pierrepoint was of opinion that the privilege of representing Slowcomb—for which there were two members—could be acquired for between two and three thousand pounds; he would venture to say three at the outside.

'It is a large sum to throw away upon a caprice,' observed Mr. Pennicuick (as though he had been in the habit of investing his money in works of public utility for the benefit of the nation), 'and I conclude that my return will at least be realised if I do so. If success could be guaranteed, I don't think I should grudge even the three thousand.'

Mr. Pierrepoint gave a deprecatory smile.

'Well, of course, a guarantee is out of the question; but I will pledge my professional reputation that—if you will be guided by my advice—in five weeks hence you will be one of the members for Slowcomb, though this is the last time I shall be able to say as much.'

'You think that at the next general election we shall have the Ballot?'

'There is no doubt of it; and though, in my opinion, it will not very much alter matters, nothing can then be predicated for certain. At present the thing lies in a nutshell. Sir James Tremaine and Warren only just scraped in last time by forty votes, and the Liberals had a very shaky candidate. In your case no one will have a word to say.'

'Well, I don't know that there is much against me,' said Pennicuick.

'On the contrary, everything is in your favour; now, Tremaine and Warren, though united in face of the common danger—that is, yourself—will not pull very well together. The borough has been in Sir James's family for four generations. He represents the principle of feudality. Warren, on the other hand, is a *novus homo*, and only a Conservative on that account; it being the quickest method to gain admission among the Upper Ten. Warren's men—he has the ironworks, you know, where the mechanics are Radicals to a man—only vote for him from *esprit de corps*.'

'And because, being mechanics,' observed Mr. Pennicuick drily, 'they appreciate the principle of the lever.'

'Not at all. You are quite mistaken, my dear sir. If they did not like their chieftain—who has a pleasant fluent way with

him enough, and is a good paymaster—they would throw him over. They would much rather vote with him on your side against Tremaine, but they will stand by their man.'

'Then he will be as safe as Tremaine himself?'

'More so; it is Sir James who will have to go.'

'Impossible! why, he owns half the place.'

'Just so. This is how it is. Sir James is a thorough party man. His people will have orders to split their votes: he will promise, moreover, that there shall be no plumping. I shall take care that early on the polling day you will be ahead of them both. Then Warren (for I know him) will get frightened, and will privately let his men know that they are to plump for *him*. They will certainly do so since they hate Sir James, and that great feudal chief will be left out in the cold.'

'But that will be very discreditable in Warren?'

Mr. Pierrepoint shrugged his shoulders.

'Everybody is not a gentleman, like yourself, Mr. Pennicuick. You of course would scorn to break a promise—even though it were only implied. It would make no matter to you whether it was expressed in writing, witnessed, signed and sealed, or merely an understanding between friends: it would have the same force.'

'I suppose so; yes,' said Pennicuick. He endeavoured to speak with indifference, but he felt his cheeks burn.

'Well, of course; but this Warren will act like a cur.'

A cur! That was the term this parliamentary agent—no very particular person, and one used to deal with very 'shaky' characters—applied to one who broke his promises even about election matters and to a mere political acquaintance. What would he call a man (wondered Pennicuick) who had pledged his word to

a dying man—a man, too, who had died for him, and who was his dearest friend—and deliberately ignored it!

'Well, Mr. Pierrepoint, I shall go in for Slowcomb.'

'Very good.' Mr. Pierrepoint opened a ledger, and with some demonstrativeness put his pen through a couple of names. 'You will have a fair field, and I believe a good deal of favour.'

'I am not the first applicant for the place, it seems?'

'No, the third. The other two were shilly-shallying. They will both complain that I have come to terms with you, but secretly will both be glad. Bunkum of that sort is very common. The writs for the boroughs will be out at the end of the month, so we have not too much time before us. You would like to be spared as much trouble as possible, I conclude?'

'Not at all. I should like to go down at once, and begin my canvass.'

'Very good. If you will call to-morrow at this hour, I will furnish you with all preliminary information.'

CHAPTER XIII.

ON CANVASS.

On the third day after that interview with Mr. Pierrepoint, Ralph Pennicuick was at Slowcomb, 'putting up,' as it was then called (perhaps because guests had a good deal to put up with), at the 'Swan with Two Necks' at Slowcomb. It was a fine country inn of the old style, with huge rooms smelling very fusty though they were full of draughts; great four-poster beds with canopies an inch thick in dust; candlesticks of massive silver; and a great reputation for old port. It was very lofty, but it had no 'lift'; there was not a spring mattress in the house; there was no smoking room, no bath room, no reading room. For any modern comfort that it could supply, it might have been furnished a century ago. But it had always been the head-quarters of the 'yellows,' and the yellow candidate patronised it accordingly.

If that most respectable widow woman, the landlady, could have looked into the heart of this guest she delighted to honour, when on the second day after his arrival she expressed her hopes—according to immemorial usage—that he found the 'Swan with Two Necks' to his liking, it is probable she would have experienced a severe shock. He had been all the world over (though, it is true, always with an eye to his personal comfort), and he thought this

highly respectable inn at Slowcomb '*the* most infernal hole in which he had ever set foot.'

It was certainly an irritating place of abode for anybody, on account of the solemn air of pretence and dignity which pervaded it There was a man in the great hall in a kind of military uniform, who did nothing but open and shut the door, and sleep in a sort of sedan chair without handles. If the head waiter had worn an apron (which was not to be thought of), you would have concluded him to have been a bishop at least, and his method of performing his duties carried out that idea. Every meal was a solemn rite, and the arrangement of the napkins was as vital a question with him as 'vestments' to a High Church ecclesiastic. This magnificent personage waited on Mr. Pennicuick with his own hands, in the first-floor apartment (fifty feet long by thirty broad) that had been assigned to him; and in course of time his use was discovered; he had been created (it was evident) for the purpose of introducing deputations.

Mr. Hatton cultivated him, with the sinister object of 'drawing him out' and reproducing him for the benefit of society in town. The female domestics, being carefully selected for their great respectability and mature years, did not distract his attention from this study.

I have said that the 'Swan with Two Necks' would have been distasteful to anyone not a mummy or a fossil, but to Ralph Pennicuick it was something worse. He slept—or rather he retired to rest—in an apartment admirably adapted for lying-in-state, but little suited to a living occupant. There were two steps at the side of the bed by which access could be gained to it; but once in it you were in a sea of feathers, which overwhelmed you with its

billows; the pillow was feathery too, and you were smothered there as certainly as elsewhere. It was not you that 'tossed,' but the bed itself. Now and then, like the porpoise, you came to the top for air; you sat up, that is, and breathed a breath or two; but even then you sank down, down, and were presently submerged sitting. To complain of this bed, with which so many candidates had expressed themselves satisfied, would be, Pennicuick felt, to endanger the prospects of the Liberal cause in Slowcomb.

An adventure happened to him, however, the very first night, of a nature so terrible, that he almost made up his mind to leave the place, and let Sir James and Mr. Warren misrepresent it for another Parliament. He had fallen after some hours into a perturbed sleep, from which he was awakened by the splash of water; it mingled with his dream, as such things will, and what it seemed at first to be was the noise the cormorants made which he had seen fishing in the river when with his friend in China. His dreams were often laid in those scenes, and this had been a comparatively quiet one; not filled with prisons, and tortures, and one ghastly spectacle—a mangled body tied to an upright stake—which haunted him with terrible persistence. Still it had been graphic and lifelike enough to hold him for some waking moments in its spell. He leaped from the bed, and applied one of the quaint wax candles on his dressing table to the night-light which he always kept burning. The dropping of water was still heard: but he now understood that it was only that intermittent splash and choking which often takes place at night in the pipes of such establishments as the 'Swan.' The aspect of the room was a little more gloomy than it had been, but he recognised it well enough; the two black feathers at the corners of the bed-head (for there

were feathers *there* too) looked more like funeral plumes than ever, and he was turning from them with a half sneer, half shudder (common enough with him now when he was alone), to put out the light, when something shining on the carpet attracted his attention. He stooped down and picked it up; then uttered a cry of fear so loud and wild that it must have rung through any house of modern construction. Unfortunately, however (as he thought at the time), the state rooms of this ancient inn were provided with inner doors of baize, through which no sound could easily penetrate, and his voice was unheard. He sank into a chair in a perspiration of fear, and not until some minutes later did he muster courage sufficient to examine the thing which had filled him with such terror.

What he thought it was, was the Shay-le of Buddha that he had stolen from the temple, and which had been the cause of the catastrophe that had slain his friend and made a scoundrel of himself. What it really was, was a drop that had fallen from the great chandelier that hung from the centre of the room, and on which the light played as it lay on the carpet as though it had been the Kohinoor. Though Pennicuick thus convinced himself as to what it was, the effect of his mistake was by no means transient. It shook his nerves, and, what was worse, turned his thoughts and dreams more than ever into that channel from which he was always striving to free them. In vain he said to himself that it was an infernal shame (he did not say upon whose part, but made it somehow a vague grievance against the government of the universe) that he should be troubled in this way about a transgression for which he had done his best to make atonement. It was no fault of his that Conway's daughter had refused his bounty; and as to the

amount of it, if he had offered her 20,000*l.*—*the* 20,000*l.*—she would probably have refused it just the same. It was not as if he had not tried to put himself right with her. In opposing her marriage with Raymond he had only exercised a privilege enjoyed by every father. Young Milburn was a better match for her every way, and he had done all he could to bring it about: had asked the fellow to dinner (though he hated the sight of him), and gone out of his way to promote it. As to giving up the lump sum, now, it could not be done. No possible excuse could be made for it, supposing even he contemplated such an act of folly. The consideration that 'nobody knew about it,' or even that there was no real claim upon him—only a matter of morbid sentiment—no longer weighed with him; he had, as it were, long sailed by all those obstacles, which had once looked so formidable; and yet he was not in smooth water. It really was 'deuced hard.' His health, of course, was not what it had been, or he would have known how to deal with these chimæras. It was possible, notwithstanding, that they would have proved too many for Mr. Pennicuick, had he been doomed to spend much more time in the solemn solitudes of the 'Swan;' but he was so fortunate as to make so favourable an impression upon a Mr. Major, the mayor of Slowcomb and the leading Liberal of the place, that he invited him to remove from the 'Swan with Two Necks' to his own home.

This was a villa residence, just outside the town, which in its newness and primness offered the strongest contrast to his late quarters, and was therefore all the more welcome to him. There were huge rooms—but full of light, without and within—that offered the same facilities for the reception of his hoped-for constituents which those of the inn had done, and Mr. Major threw

them open for that purpose with generous patriotism. 'Don't you deny yourself to anybody' was the advice he gave to his guest, and Pennicuick followed it not unwillingly. It was a relief to him to be always doing something, or receiving somebody, though he would have smiled his old sardonic smile, if you had said that his mind, was occupied. Whatever he did was to distract his mind, and dissipate his more importunate thoughts. It was with this object that he made his canvass on foot, or horseback, or even sometimes in a carriage with good-natured Mrs. Major beside him, in colours that did more credit to her principles than to her complexion.

He had also to make innumerable speeches. They were rather good ones of their kind—certainly above the average of similar displays of eloquence that were to be heard at that time throughout the country—but it was a perpetual matter of surprise to him that anybody could be got to listen to them without being paid for it. He had always had a high idea of the stupidity of his fellow-creatures: he had thought it 'stupendous,' and incalculable; but he now felt that the adjectives he had applied to it fell short of the subject. Of course it was very sad that people should be thronging to hear a gentleman speak with no particular eloquence upon themes that were by that time as sucked oranges; but Mr. Pennicuick did not reflect that, though no person was paid (directly) for hearing him, there was at least no charge made upon his side, and that the love of gratuitous entertainment—under which head are even comprised sermons and orreries—is one of the strongest passions of uncultivated man and woman. Moreover, there was just that *soupçon* of 'improvement' about these oratorical flights of his, which reconciled people, who might

otherwise have had scruples about throwing away their time, to coming to hear him. But to the orator himself these harangues were (not vanity, for, to do him justice, he thought anything but highly of them, but) vexation of spirit. He had a positive feeling of humiliation in saying the same thing over and over again, in district *A*, district *B*, and district *C*, and especially, as sometimes happened, to the same people. His excellent host, for example, gave him his countenance everywhere, and never dreamt how uncomfortable he made his guest, by sitting apparently with rapt attention (sucking the knob of his umbrella) while his candidate aired his well-worn platitudes, or ascended the oft-trodden path of declamation! He greatly over-estimated Mr. Major's sufferings, which were set down as 'all in the day's work,' for that gentleman's whole heart was in the election for Slowcomb, the result of which he honestly believed would be to overturn the principle of Feudalism, and to make Tyrants tremble.

Mr. Pennicuick saw nothing of this 'vision splendid,' but only the farmers or small tradespeople he happened to be addressing, and to whom he could not conceive that he was giving pleasure: but at the same time the whole thing was so new to him that it took him out of himself, and effected for the time the very object he had in view. It was a much greater change than anything he had experienced in going abroad: for after all that is but a superficial change. New scenery, costumes, and language do not go so far down as a new range of human character; he had made in foreign parts about the same sort of acquaintances that he met at home, and had never probably so much as spoken to a greengrocer (for instance) in all his life. Mr. Major himself was a most interesting study—though his interest in him, it is true, was

grievously marred by his own cynicism. It seemed very extraordinary to him that a man who had been an ironmonger—Major's 'registered' coalscuttle was a household word in many domestic circles—and made a fortune by it, should identify himself with any kind of political movement. What could it matter to him how the world was governed (so long as cutlery was not superseded), or who was in, or who was out? But this mattered to Mr. Major (or at least he thought so) very much.

Mr. Pierrepoint had the highest opinion of him, and wrote to Pennicuick, 'You could not have done a wiser thing than stay at "the Andirons"'—which was the popular name for the villa—'only don't forget to keep on your rooms at the "Swan" all the same.'

After each day's proceedings Mr. Major made a most elaborate calculation of the results, and as the date of the election drew near became more and more confident.

'I'll lay a fippun' note, Mr. Pennicuick, as we'll bring you in at the head of the poll.'

Pennicuick would have taken the bet, which was clearly a good 'hedge,' but that he was afraid it would look like a want of confidence. As a matter of fact, he himself had but little hope or fear, and of course no actual knowledge of the matter whatever. He had already begun to think that Parliamentary life would bore him a good deal, and interest him scarcely at all; and, unlike all other candidates that ever were, he felt that he should be sorry when all the turmoil of the contest should be over. Still, of course, he wished to win: the notion of throwing away 3,000*l.* was displeasing to him, and the idea, which his host expressed, of 'at all events placing the great Liberal party of his country under a great

obligation' would not have gone very far with him in the way of consolation.

He prided himself on never having yet been baulked in anything on which he had set his mind, and he had a reputation to keep up at the clubs to that effect. He had met his two opponents in the course of his canvass, and of course with courtesy; his behaviour towards them throughout had indeed been rather more civil than some of his supporters approved.

'If there was anything against you, as there was against Gaythorne' (the previous Liberal candidate), 'it would be different,' they had naïvely said; 'but you have nothing to fear from them; and you should hold your own as tight as wax.' Certainly no canvass at Slowcombe had ever been conducted with so few personalities. There were yellow posters, of course, calling upon all slaves to put their necks under Sir James's chariot wheels—and even a very spirited likeness of him in the character of the Genius of Feudalism, driving a couple of steeds, with Oppression and Exaction written upon their foreheads; and there was a pleasant little cartoon of Mr. Warren in the act of blacking boots. But the highest flight of offence to which the blue posters attained as respected Mr. Pennicuick was the inquiry, 'Who is He?' by which they intended to convey that that gentleman was a total stranger in those parts, and had no business to be there at all.

The hustings had been erected opposite the Town Hall, just on the right-hand side of it; a space cleared for some building operations had been temporarily taken by the Blues for the erection of a temporary hoarding and the display thereon of banners, mottoes, and the interrogation, 'Ralph Pennicuick, who is He?' in very startling characters indeed. On the day when the candidates were

proposed, some of these queries were removed, and the gigantic inquiry 'What has he Done?' was substituted for them, with a large space beneath either signifying that he had done nothing, or to be filled up by the imagination of the Conservative reader with 'atrocities.' This amused Mr. Major very much. 'It is very seldom in these days, my dear sir, that any candidate comes before a constituency with such clean hands as yours. . Gaythorne, between ourselves, was a very queer fish indeed: I worked for him, of course; but it was against the grain, and with feelings very different from those I experience in your case. There was a story, and I believe it had some truth in it, that he had robbed a ward of his—quite a girl—of thousands of pounds, and thereby compelled her to go out as a governess.'

'I should have thought the law would have taken cognizance of a fraud of that kind,' observed Pennicuick carelessly.

'Well, he was on the safe side of the law; the girl's father, it seems, had an implicit trust in him, and Gaythorne betrayed it. He was very "yellow" (or rather he pretended to be, for he had in reality no principles save that of taking care of number one), and that hid his blackness; else he was a man who ought to have been hung. We have therefore had some lee way to make up, you see, but I think we have done it. To-morrow you will make your last speech as a candidate for Slowcomb; the day after you will be its representative.'

It was certain that one of the two Conservative candidates would be run very hard indeed, and that, if there was 'plumping,' Warren would be 'out of it.' Sir James, however, had given the order that all Blue votes should be split; and if this was carried out to the letter, all honest Blues (for to despond in such cases is

to be lukewarm and almost dishonest) were very sanguine about carrying both their men. In those days the Ballot was a question very hotly debated; but if the three candidates for Slowcomb—two of whom were openly opposed to that measure, and the third (though he supported it) was privately as much against it as themselves—could have looked a few years ahead, they would certainly—as candidates—have altered their opinion. Our children's children, accustomed to the present quiet of electioneering proceedings, will be unable to picture to themselves the riot and disorder that attended the 'nomination day,' even in the dullest of dull country boroughs. Slowcomb was not only dull, but really respectable, except for the ironworking element ('on this occasion only' allied with 'the party of order'), and yet for two days it was given up to licence--and the licensing system. From morn to dewy eve every public-house was full, and all places of business empty.

To the candidates, as they stood on the hustings, was presented a sea of upturned faces, half of which shrieked applause, and half hurled defiance. As to the statements of their political convictions, it was fortunate that they were intrusted in manuscript to the reporters for the Press, or the world would have retained nothing of them beyond disjointed fragments. Of the first sentences nothing at all was heard, and the man who knew his business best, and who in this case was Sir James, moved his lips, gesticulated, and smiled with the utmost sweetness for five minutes, without uttering a syllable; after which there was a lull, and the crowd began to listen.

It is not necessary for us to do the like, and the less so since he only repeated for the most part what his proposer and seconder

had said before him. In his place in the House, Sir James had once risen, it was said, to complain of the draught from an open window; but that had been his only Parliamentary utterance. He told the electors of Slowcomb on this occasion that though he hoped his heart was in the right place, he was not much of a speaker. And no exception could have been taken to the truth of that statement by the most censorious.

Mr. Warren, on the contrary, was glib, and possessed that singular power of walking round a subject, without ever going into it, that is peculiar to a certain class of men, and, curiously enough, especially to self-made men. They have, perhaps, expended so much of their practical force in getting money, that they have none left for other uses. He paid some rather fulsome compliments to Tremaine, 'an old and tried representative,' whereat Mr. Major nudged Pennicuick, and whispered, 'You see, they are as thick as thieves.' The yellow candidate nodded adhesion, but in his own mind came to the conclusion that this sycophancy was a good sign, and went rather to corroborate Mr. Pierrepoint's view, that if it came to a pinch the ironmaster would throw the baronet over.

When Mr. Warren sat down, Mr. Harwood, a country gentleman in the neighbourhood, proposed Mr. Pennicuick in a neat speech, with a quotation from Shelley at the end of it about the banner of Freedom streaming 'against' the wind, which caused much discussion afterwards in the local journals upon scientific grounds; and then got up Mr. Pennicuick's seconder, Mr. Major. This gentleman stood in the remarkable position of believing every word he said, and saying it from the bottom of his heart; and if his aspirates had been as unexceptionable as his aspirations, he

would have been a very formidable orator indeed. Even as it was, he began to attract so much rapt attention, that the brass band of the Blues were given orders to divert it, which was done forthwith. Art is often compared with Nature, to the former's disadvantage; yet what is the human voice when in competition with a trombone? Mr. Major, however, was permitted to say a few words in conclusion which had a personal reference to his candidate. 'We have been asked,' he said (indeed, I am afraid he said 'ast'), '"Who is He?" and I will answer that question. He is a gentleman of old family and good estate, who, having passed his life in a varied experience of mankind at home and abroad, has turned of late a mind of no ordinary calibre to the consideration of those vital questions——' Here the trombone expressed dissent. 'It has been asked—I see the question on yonder hoarding—"What has he Done?" He——' A roar of laughter shook the crowd. The blank space on the hoarding in question had suddenly become filled up, as if by magic. It was in reality a very well-known pantomime trick, but it was new to Slowcombe eyes, and exceedingly effective. A large board, worked on a pivot, had suddenly been reversed; and underneath the question, 'What has he Done?' now appeared in enormous characters, 'INQUIRE AT DHULANG, CHINA.'

CHAPTER XIV.

'AN HON. MEMBER.'

THE suggestion that had suddenly appeared upon the Conservative hoarding owed all its effect of course, so far as the great mass of the spectators were concerned, to its unexpectedness. There were probably not half a dozen present who remembered to have heard of Dhulang—though it had been mentioned in the newspapers in connection with Conway's death—and very few who had any definite notion even of China. But to Pennicuick the unexpectedness of this spectacle only contributed to the shock he experienced. How the thing got there at all was the problem that confounded him, and for the moment seemed to turn his blood to water; he felt as weak and flaccid as a starved man, with no capability within him save that of abject terror. He stared at those pregnant words till—absurd as they were to the common eye, and reproducing indeed but a very ordinary form of advertisement—they seemed to be written, like Belshazzar's warning on the wall, in letters of fire. And at that moment his seconder sat down, and he found himself called upon to make his speech. He could about as easily have leaped across the street on to the roof of the Town Hall, which was paved, like every other available space, with expectant faces: he was tongue-tied, dumb. From the

direction of his eyes, which were still fixed upon the hated words, the cause of his silence was instinctively guessed at, and a roar of 'Dhulang, Dhulang! tell us what took place at Dhulang' shook the air.

'I will tell you,' answered a sharp stern voice; it was Pennicuick's own, though it was difficult to recognise it as such, and though he himself scarcely knew that he was speaking. The instinct of self-preservation—always powerful within him—had come at last, and all the stronger for its temporary intermission. Those shrill and piercing tones produced an immediate silence. 'I will answer you—you, whoever you are, who have written on that wall that cruel question—and you, my friends, shall judge between us, whether I or the writer has cause to be ashamed. At Dhulang I lost, through a miserable misfortune, and by the most cruel of deaths, the dearest friend that man ever had. I did all that I could, so help me Heaven, to save him, as is well known to many persons then in China whose sympathy I can never sufficiently acknowledge, but I failed. It is a subject so distressing, so ineffably painful to me, that the mere mention of it affects me—as you have just seen. And yet I would rather suffer thus, if it were for all eternity, than change places with that ruffian, who, taking advantage of my known weakness, should have chosen such an opportunity as this, when I need all my powers to express the gratitude I feel towards you for your kind reception of me, to blast them with a reminder such as *that*——' As he spoke with withering scorn, and flung his hand out in the direction of the obnoxious placard, a rush was made upon the hoarding by the furious 'Yellows,' and in a few minutes it was levelled with the ground. 'That's worth at least fifty votes to us,' cried Mr. Major in Penni-

cuick's ear; 'but don't press it; now stick it into them about the Ballot.'

'I have done with personalities,' continued Pennicuick; 'I do not need any disclaimer from my honourable opponents, with respect to that outrage which you have just treated in the only way that it deserved. Such mean and anonymous slanders can never emanate, I am sure, from gentlemen who have used such hard words about votes by Ballot,' et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. The speech was a successful one even on its merits, but it certainly owed its triumphant reception to the burst of scorn which had been its herald.

'My dear Pennicuick, I congratulate you,' cried Mr. Major, laughing, as they drove off to 'The Andirons' together after the show of hands, which had been two to one in favour of his friend. 'As a piece of acting your treatment of the thing was perfect. You took us all in for the moment: and for my part I thought you were quite floored.'

'Acting, Mr. Major! I don't understand you!'

'Oh pray, my dear sir, don't mistake me. Of course you felt all you said: but the opportunity—the *patness*—that is what charms me beyond expression. What a tactician you are, too, while all the time you have pretended to know nothing about electioneering! How the deuce did you manage—on the enemy's ground, too—to get that placard put up?'

Pennicuick smiled and threw himself back in the carriage. If Mr. Major really supposed that he had put that horrid placard up himself, so much the better. It would save him a great deal of torture in the way of examination and investigation. It had been upon the tip of his tongue to answer, 'I know no more than the

Dead about this thing,' but the thought of 'the Dead' had restrained him. What hateful conspiracy had been at work to remind him of what had happened at Dhulang, which was unknown to living man, except a few Chinese? What personal enemy could have set the thing on foot he burnt to know; but he also shrank from all inquiry into that subject. It was much better to let it drop, and Mr. Major's suggestion offered the readiest way to do so.

But in the mean time he was racked by forebodings; filled with presentiments of evil, to which he could give no tangible shape. He had come down to Slowcomb with no other object than to forget one terrible incident in his past life, and, lo, he had become publicly reminded of it, and that too with the obvious intention of imputing to him some wrongdoing in the matter. Who *could* have done this?

When Mr. Major descanted at the dinner-table, which was crowded with 'Yellows' that evening, upon his friend's admirable speech, everybody expressed their satisfaction that so mean a trick of the opposite party had met with so signal a failure.

'I wonder who was the man who did it? He must have been more fool than knave,' said one.

Then Mr. Major chuckled, and said, 'You must take care what you are saying. For my part, I think it was neither fool nor knave, but a very honest clever fellow.'

Then of course everybody knew that he meant Pennicuick. That gentleman denied the impeachment, but in so suspicious a manner that it was as good as an acknowledgment of its truth. If he had had time to think about the affair coolly, perhaps he would not have done this: he would have felt that such a bit of strategy was much more clever than creditable to him: but his

mind was too troubled to consider the matter; he only felt relief that it had got explained in some way, and his reserve protected him from cross-examination. The guests too, if they had been less flushed by their party triumph, and not so brimful of electioneering sentiments, would probably not have expressed such admiration for the *ruse*. Fortunately for the interests they held so dear, the report of Mr. Pennicuick's connivance in the thing did not get abroad before the election was over; and as matters were, the incident gained them, as Mr. Major had prophesied, a large number of votes. A good deal is excused to Party tactics, but a mean device, even in electioneering warfare, is held by most Englishmen in contempt. The thing which is expressed in the vulgar tongue as 'an infernal shame' is repudiated by Blue and Yellow and all the colours of the rainbow with us, as it is repudiated nowhere else. In vain Sir James Tremaine and Mr. Warren issued a joint manifesto which denied all complicity in setting up the obnoxious placard: in vain the Blue 'organ' published a special edition that same evening, explaining how 'the contract for the hoarding had been undertaken by our esteemed fellow-townsmen Messrs. Deal and Maple, whose names would be a guarantee against any such ill behaviour. The occurrence in question had taken them as much by surprise as anyone, but investigations were being made, and it seemed that some London hand, recently taken on in their employment, had been at the bottom of the mischief.'

All this was read at leisure, twenty-four hours afterwards, and accompanied by much more, not in the present edition, to the effect that the whole affair had been an infamous device of the enemy; but in the mean time there was no time for reading, but

only for talking of the Yellow candidate's admirable defence, and for voting.

As man after man ascended the steps of the polling booth, you might see them turn round, and point to the ruins of the hoarding and converse with one another evidently about that 'infernal shame.' Mr. Pierrepoint did not come to Slowcomb in person—he worked like Moltke in his closet, and marshalled his battalions with the pen—but his advice was implicitly followed. Mr. Pennicuick's voters polled early. At eleven o'clock the numbers stood —Pennicuick 400, Tremaine 368, Warren 350. The disparity between the two last, small as it was, was not Sir James's fault; some tenant-farmers would not vote to their feudal chieftain's disadvantage even at his express command. 'If we can only keep ahead till the afternoon,' said Mr. Major, 'Pierrepoint thinks we shall be safe.'

'Why?' inquired Mr. Pennicuick innocently.

'Oh, I suppose he relies on the prestige. There are some men who will never vote except upon the winning side.'

Then Pennicuick understood that Mr. Pierrepoint was really a great commander, and knew his men. He had entrusted the key of his position to his employer only, feeling confident that it would be safe with him. If good-natured frank-speaking Mr. Major had had it in his possession it might have slipped out of his hands, and Sir James might have been warned of his danger. At four o'clock the relative position of the three candidates remained unchanged. Pennicuick had 910 votes, Sir James had 890, Mr. Warren had 876.

It now seemed almost certain that the Yellow candidate would come in, and in all probability at the head of the poll. But some

of the staunch Blues said, 'No; Pennicuick might come in (and be hanged to him!), but it would be seen that Sir James would be above him. For when Warren saw clearly he had no chance, he would tell his men to plump for the Baronet (without whose aid he would have been absolutely nowhere), and at least put this interloping Whig in the second place.' At five o'clock, when the poll closed, these prophets had the mortification of reading the following result:

Mr. Pennicuick	950
Mr. Warren	920
Sir James Tremaine . . .	908

And much as they detested Pennicuick in consequence, they hated Warren more. For they had the intelligence to understand the tactics when accomplished which Mr. Pierrepoint's sagacity had foreseen. Mr. Major was wild with joy, and congratulated the new member for Slowcomb with genuine enthusiasm.

'Those 950 will cost me just three pounds a head,' said that gentleman ruefully, though in reality he was well pleased. For the moment his success and the novelty of his position monopolized his attention; and he almost began to think that by getting a seat in Parliament he had obtained his end. Except for that public allusion to Dhulang, he had been really almost free from mental trouble while at 'The Andirons,' and he felt now that he had really received a fillip. He slept better that night than he had done for months; and he awoke with sensations which, compared with his ordinary state of mind at that time, could be almost called elation.

More than one eminent man has recorded his feelings on finding himself, for the first time, a member of the British Legis-

lature, in terms highly complimentary to that body (though, to be sure, it was before they mixed with it), but no such pride of position was experienced by Mr. Pennicuick; he had by far too good an opinion of his own place in the world to be moved by any consideration of that kind. But he was very pleased that he had secured the article for which he was to pay his money, and also that his reputation for getting what he had a fancy for would now stand higher than ever: for some folks had ventured to say that Ralph Pennicuick was not cut out for electioneering, and would be certain to fail in paying due attention to the interesting children of his constituents.

He found his host in equally good spirits in his morning-room, where they were generally accustomed to meet and have a few words of business together before breakfast.

'How is my honourable friend the member for Slowcomb?' was his cheerful greeting; but Mr. Pennicuick's quick eye noticed that there was something else in his mind beside congratulations, and told him so at once.

'What a clever fellow you are, Pennicuick!' answered he admiringly; 'well, yes, I just wanted to say two words to you about that Dhulang placard. The Blue papers this morning are full of it; and though I myself thought it a telling trick at the time, I am now inclined to think it was a mistake. I am afraid you will be worried about it a good deal to-day.'

'I don't see how I can possibly be worried, since I had nothing whatever to do with it. I saw your mistake all along, my dear Mr. Major, but I didn't think it worth while to correct it. You chose to get it into your head that I had put that placard up myself.'

'Most certainly I did, and every voter in Slowcombe has by this time got it into *his* head.'

'But for all that I didn't do it, and I never said I did.'

'I don't mean you did it with your own hands, but——'

'I do assure you, my dear sir,' interrupted Pennicuick gravely, 'that I knew nothing whatever about that disgraceful proceeding. It may have been foolish—I now perceive it was—to have allowed it to be supposed I did. But I give you my honour that I am as innocent of the whole matter as you are yourself.'

'Very good; you must tell them that on the hustings,' replied Mr. Major, but in a tone which implied, 'You must tell that to the Horse Marines.' 'Let us have our breakfast' (after *that*, was what his face added). It was plain he didn't believe him.

Pennicuick was furious, but there was nothing left for him but silence. If this ironmonger would not believe a gentleman's word of honour, there was an end of the matter; and there was this advantage about it, that such an insult wiped out at once all his gratitude for the hospitality that had been offered to him at 'The Andirons,' and relieved him from all sense of obligation. It was curious, of course, that Pennicuick should have felt so very touchy about his word of honour, which had been so infamously broken in respect to his dead friend; but, like a lady who has 'slipped in her time,' he was on that very account all the more tender of his reputation; and, moreover, it is to be observed that nothing aggravates your criminal so much as to be accused of a crime he did not commit, though he has committed fifty other worse ones.

As to the placard itself, Pennicuick had come to the conclusion that it had been merely a hap-hazard device of the enemy—a shaft shot at a venture, and need not give him any disturbance. It was

known through the newspapers that he had been at a place called Dhulang, and that something dreadful had occurred there; that mistake in the first telegram might have suggested some wrong-doing on his part; and hence this vague attack upon his character. Except for Mr. Major's observations (which had, however, infused more of bitterness in his cup of triumph than he would have liked to own) he would have been inclined to treat the whole affair with contempt. And he resolved, henceforward, not to speak, and if possible not to think, about it again. But in this he was reckoning not only without his host, but in ignorance of the dimensions which the affair had assumed within the last four hours—that is, since the publication of that admirable Conservative organ the 'Slowcombe Intelligencer.'

As he entered his carriage-and-four with Mr. Major to go down to the Town Hall, his ears were saluted even by his own supporters with words which, though they meant encouragement, gave him the keenest annoyance. 'Stick to it, Pennicuick!' 'Tell a lie, and tell a good 'un!' 'Say it was *me!*' and (this brought down a storm of cheers) 'Say it was Warren, for it's just like him!' were cries that convinced him that his host's views of the matter were shared by his own party, and that his determination to deny having had any hand in the affair had been already circulated—as, indeed, it was highly necessary should be done. From the 'Blue' faction, who had only heard that he was the guilty party, and not the denial of his guilt, he was received by yells of indignation, delivered in that high pitch of nasal frenzy to which the vocal organs of no other nation but our own have, I really believe, attained. 'Yah, yah, trickster!' 'Yellow sneak, Yellow sneak!' 'Dhulang, Dhulang!' and similar outpourings testified to their

sense of his iniquity, and also, perhaps, of the success that had attended its commission. But the conviction that it was a dirty trick to play, and unworthy of any candidate, was general, and also —it was impossible to ignore the fact—that he, Ralph Pennicuick, was the man who had played it.

It was anything but consolatory to him that some of his more thorough-going supporters of the lower rank were prepared to justify his supposed conduct. Their 'Quite right too!' 'Who cares? you've won the day,' were perhaps the most galling of all the cries that met his ear. That triumphal entry of his into his own borough, instead of being, as he was presently to call it, 'the proudest moment of his life,' was perhaps the most humiliating portion of it. The innocent, it may be said, do not feel such degradations; but Pennicuick felt it the more bitterly for the very reason that he was innocent. It did not strike him that he had his own villany to thank for it, since, but for that, the circumstances could never have arisen.

His appearance on the hustings—for, being at the head of the poll, he was the first to speak—was the signal for an outburst compared with which all previous manifestations sank into insignificance. It was like one of those revival meetings where the prize of salvation is supposed to be given to the loudest groaner. The cheers of the Yellows grew faint before that dull roar of execration. That idea of the 'infernal shame' had, it seemed, veered round altogether to the other side. In common, however, with many noxious persons (who often set a fancy value on their own lives and interests which is as deplorable as it is unreasonable), Ralph Pennicuick had plenty of pluck. The spectacle of this concentrated contempt and hate braced his nerves and gave vigour

to his tones. 'I am sorry,' he said, 'electors of Slowcombe, once more to intrude upon you any matter personal to myself; but if anyone has told you that I had anything, directly or indirectly, to do with that placard about Dhulang, he has told a lie.' The uproar was here so tremendous that he had to wait for several minutes for a hearing. 'If anyone here believes it, he is an idiot; if anyone here has repeated it, he has propagated a falsehood.' This was indiscreet, for as all present did believe it, even including his own party, and had talked about nothing else that morning, he had simply given everyone the alternative of being a fool or a knave. The storm of disapprobation was such that there was nothing for it but for the brass band of the Yellows to strike up 'See the Conquering Hero comes,' and thereby to remind honest folks that, whatever might be said against the man of their choice, the Good Cause had triumphed. The cheering was henceforward as continuous as the hissing; but between these Mr. Pennicuick's oration was lost until the next day, when it duly appeared in the newspapers. His whole speech was, in fact, delivered in dumb show.

Then he had to listen to Mr. Warren's speech, which would have been received almost as ill as his own but for his supposed delinquency, upon which the hon. gentleman dwelt long and unctuously. His faculty of going round and round a subject, without ever actually going into it, was here invaluable to him. He contrived to express his own belief in his honourable opponent's innocence of the trick laid to his charge, while at the same time leaving the impression of his guilt upon the audience twice as strong as it was before. Ere he had finished speaking, handbills, printed on Mr. Major's advice, were circulating among the crowd, offering 500*l.* reward to anyone who would discover the actual per-

petrator of the offence in question: but the only effect of this was to cause a costermonger of Conservative opinions and excellent lungs to call out at the highest pitch of his voice, 'I know the man: his name is Ralph Pennicuick: so hand me over the money.' The roar of laughter that greeted this sally was the only good-natured thing in the whole proceedings.

When the ordeal was over, and Pennicuick, before descending among the howling throng, turned to bid his host good-bye—for his traps had been already despatched from the villa to the railway station—Mr. Major had disappeared.

The hon. member for Slowcomb understood at once that the hospitable ironmonger objected to shake hands with him. He had done his best for his candidate up to the very last, even to the suggestion of the offer of the reward; so much he owed to his party: but

> The hand of Major was his own,
> And never would in friendly grasp
> The hand of such as this man clasp.

In his opinion, Pennicuick was guilty of a most audacious falsehood, and Mr. Major had a prejudice against even courageous lying. 'It is very hard,' said this honest fellow to his wife when he got home, 'that we should be so unfortunate in our candidates. The last one was a rogue, and this one is a knave at the very least.'

'If you will meddle with politics, Sam,' answered that sensible woman, 'you must expect such things. You can't touch pitch and have clean hands.' Then, with that inconsistency which distinguishes her sex, she added, 'I do hope next time you will not be so diffident, but insure the borough an honest representative by standing for it yourself.'

As we here take leave of this good fellow, I may say at once that when the opportunity arrived he took his wife's advice, and became, if not a shining light in Parliament, a very good burner, never flickering this way and that with the popular breath; in short, dropping metaphor, the best member that Slowcomb ever sent to the House of Commons.

That Mr. Samuel Major, formerly an ironmonger in this country town, should thus withdraw his countenance from Mr. Pennicuick, filled that gentleman with rage rather than regret. If he was so pigheaded as to believe he had put up that placard, in spite of his positive assertion to the contrary, let him believe it: but at the same time it was a most infernal piece of impertinence that he should do so. As to the borough with which he had just professed himself identified heart and soul, he hated the sight of it, and could hardly keep his face from showing it to the crowd of supporters who, with waving of hats and rounds of cheers, accompanied him to the very door of his railway carriage.

The first words that he uttered softly to himself, as the train glided out of the station and as he lay back in his cushioned corner, were, 'Curse the place and all that's in it!' Which was not grateful in the Honourable Member for Slowcomb.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF GREATNESS.

A GREAT author has described his feelings on waking one morning under the very same roof which sheltered Mr. Ralph Pennicuick, and 'finding himself famous'; this no doubt is very pleasant when publicity breaks upon us in that engaging form. Even to find oneself notorious and not famous is gratifying to some minds, though I do not personally sympathize with them. I can remember—it is very many years ago, alas!—when the words of the critics used to go through and through me: when they called me a fool, I shivered; when they touched my trembling ears with praise, I glowed. It seems now as if every publishing season had given me another skin, I am grown so very pachydermatous. Still, if the papers were to call me a Rogue, I suppose I should feel *that*. How much more keenly then did Mr. Ralph Pennicuick, who had not been used to have publicity conferred upon him, feel *his* position, when he woke on the morning after his election for Slowcombe and found himself—'*in*famous'! He had flattered himself that what had taken place in the obscure borough of Slowcombe would never be narrated much beyond its limits; he had no idea that, by becoming a Member of Parliament, he had not only become a public character, but a public enemy, at least in the eyes of one great

section of the body politic. He had turned out a Conservative member, and thereby had caused—though it is true in common with some others—the righteous indignation of the whole Conservative Press. If he had been beaten they would have dismissed him with a few words of contempt—just a kick or two administered to his prostrate body; but as he had triumphed, they rained on him shot and shell and especially that description of missile used in Chinese warfare (and therefore familiar to him) called 'stink pots.' He was, they of course said, 'a mischievous interloper;' but he also combined two characteristics seldom found in the same individual; he was at once both a Jerry Sneak and a Baron Munchausen: a cunning trickster and a most audacious liar. Worse than all, the word Dhulang, for which Pennicuick's eye sought with feverish apprehension up and down each envenomed page, was repeated everywhere. No definite charge, indeed, was made against him, but nothing that malicious innuendo could suggest was wanting. It was hinted that he had taken Conway's fate in a very philosophic manner—'it was well known that Mr. Ralph Pennicuick was a Stoic philosopher in his manner of enduring the misfortunes of his friends; that he had not hurried himself to procure a reprieve from the Chinese Government; and that, though very wealthy, he had spared his money at a time when it might have saved his friend, in order that he might spend it with a lavish hand on the venal electors of Slowcombe.'

His offer of the 500*l.* reward for the discovery of the actual perpetrator of the placard trick was treated with particular scorn. One of the papers had even calculated the cost of the handbill at thirty shillings, which it said was the sole expense to which this apparently handsome conduct could possibly put Mr. Ralph Pen-

nicuick. The Liberal papers, it is true, upheld his conduct as irreproachable and his motives as pure as the untrodden snow; but that was, as it were or as it seemed, a matter of course. It is very small satisfaction when twelve men out of a jury box announce their belief in your innocence of a crime of which twelve men *in* a jury box have declared you guilty.

He had been 'put upon his trial'—so ran the very words of one influential organ—'before the electors of Slowcombe, and if there had been only time' (and this was probably true enough) 'for them to have considered his case, their verdict would have been a very different one. As it was, it' (the organ) 'wished them joy of their brand-new representative.' He could not complain that his own words had been misrepresented, for his speech on the hustings was reproduced in each paper with the usual fidelity: they simply refused to believe his assertions.

Ralph Pennicuick was almost out of his mind with rage and terror: rage at the insult thus unjustly heaped upon him, and terror at the growing influence which that wrongdoing of his at Dhulang was exercising over his life. It was marvellous—nay, it was miraculous—that that deed done in a corner, thousands of miles from his native land, and from civilization itself, without a witness except certain savages all interested in keeping silence on the matter, should be making this stir on English soil. It was almost enough to make a man believe in an overruling Providence, or at all events in a Nemesis of some sort that awaited the transgressor; and then again the question recurred to him (which he had hoped was stifled) as to who had put up that terrible placard, 'Inquire at Dhulang, China.' Such hideous results had flowed from it, that he could now hardly deem it a haphazard blow.

While he was still at his toilet—which had become rather a protracted affair, and lucky it was for him that he did not shave, for his nerves were in no condition to hold a razor—Raymond looked in, though he had called on the previous evening to congratulate his father, it must be confessed in rather a mechanical manner, on his success.

'Well, my knight of the rueful countenance, how goes it?' inquired the elder Pennicuick, who in the presence of a fellow-creature could be generally 'himself again.' 'I hope your political opinions will not prevent your sitting down with your father to breakfast, though he is the Whig member for Slowcombe.'

'I will sit down with you with pleasure, sir, though I have long breakfasted. As for politics, they are matters that I never cared much about, and care less for now than ever.'

'Thank you,' interrupted the other sharply.

'Nay, sir, I did not mean as respected your new connection with them—that of course gives them a personal interest for me: but when one has troubles of one's own, the affairs of the British Constitution—speaking generally—do not hold any large space in one's thoughts. It was, however, about this election matter that I have come to you this morning. I suppose you have not seen the newspapers?'

'I have seen some,' answered the other carelessly. He had thrust half a dozen of them under the bed when he heard his son's voice in the passage.

'There are, I am sorry to say, some remarks of an offensive nature in one or two of them,' said Raymond gravely.

'I have not a doubt of it, my lad,' answered the other cheerfully. 'The Tories are very sore at the result of the elections, and I dare

say they do not owe me much love for winning a seat from them at Slowcombe.'

'I make allowance for party feeling, sir; but personal accusations have been made, and it seems to me of such a kind that they should be answered.'

Mr. Pennicuick desisted for a moment from trimming his once universally admired beard with some elaborate instrument of the toilet, to smile good-naturedly upon his offspring.

'How charming it is to find you still so young, Raymond! Is it possible that you have reached the legal years of discretion, and yet can advocate a man's attempting to set himself right with a newspaper? It was done once—by Richard Cobden, if I remember rightly—and with tolerable success; but the exception only proves the rule. If a Bengal tiger tore the clothes off your back, you wouldn't go and ask him for them, I suppose, nor yet for an apology. If you couldn't shoot him—and you can't in this case—you'd be glad to leave the beast alone.'

'Still, there are questions of fact, sir, which it is desirable should be made known. I don't know how you may take things now in a Parliamentary sense, but when I read in the paper that my father has told a lie, that makes my blood boil.'

'Does it, indeed, my lad?' replied the other coolly. 'What a very bad state your blood must be in! A newspaper—and especially a Tory newspaper—will say anything. The only question that the person of whom it says it has to consider is, Is that paper worth powder and shot? You can only make it feel by means of an action for libel. Now' (this with a light touch of scorn), 'is it worth my while to bring one?'

It was an admirable piece of acting. You would have said

this man was of iron; utterly impervious to the whips and stings of which he spoke.

'Well, it is not the insult that moves me so much, father,' answered Raymond hesitatingly, 'as what these blackguards have said about your behaviour to—that is, about what happened at Dhulang. Everybody knows, who knows anything about it, how loyally you stuck by your friend. And these innuendoes are abominable. Have you any personal enemy, do you think, who, knowing something of what you did, endeavours thus cruelly to misrepresent it?'

It took Ralph Pennicuick 'all he knew,' as he would have himself phrased it, to keep his colour here, and to prevent his hands from trembling. It was horrible to think that the very idea which had haunted him since that nomination day at Slowcombe should have occurred thus naturally to his son.

'Enemies, my lad!—why, of course I have enemies. The man must be a cipher indeed who has not made such.'

'But did you make one in China?'

Pennicuick's mind reverted to Fu-chow, and he gave a ghastly smile. He had certainly nothing to fear from that obscure barbarian, though he would even yet have liked to cut his pigtail off and his head with it.

'The whole Chinese race are my enemies,' said he quietly, 'but I have no quarrel with anyone in particular.'

'I of course refer to some European; and one who has communications with this country.'

'I know of no such foe, my lad,' said Pennicuick thoughtfully.

'Well, there is some malicious scoundrel at work in this

matter, sir, I feel confident: and fortunately we can dispose of his slanders. Milburn, who accompanied you when you returned to Dhulang, will, I am sure, write to the papers——'

'Not a word,' interrupted the other violently; 'I will not have a syllable written upon the subject. Pray permit me to manage my own affairs, sir.' His face was pale with passion, but he controlled himself. 'Come, my lad, let us go to breakfast.'

On the table, duly spread for that meal, was a large heap of letters. 'Ah, this is what comes of being an M.P.! I have no doubt everybody is wanting everything.' He ran his eye over the addresses. 'Yes: I thought so; strangers every one of them. They want churches endowed, chapels built, the Liberal cause supported—that is to say, from 5*l.* to 50*l.*—every one of them. I wish they may get it.'

'I know that handwriting,' observed Raymond, pointing to one of these communications, 'and I will promise you it is not a begging letter. It is from Mr. Wardlaw.'

'Wardlaw? What on earth should he be writing to me about?'

He opened the letter, and, having rapidly scanned the contents, threw it down with an execration.

'I hope there is nothing the matter, sir,' said Raymond, who feared there might be some evil news from Sandybeach. He did not love Nelly the less because he had lost her.

The elder Pennicuick in his selfish egotism forgot the cause which had aroused his son's anxiety.

'Matter? There, you may read it for yourself if you like. It is monstrous—it is infamous, that I am to be persecuted by

every human being upon this infernal subject.' And he threw the open letter across the table.

Raymond read as follows:—

DEAR SIR,—The interest which you have so strongly manifested in Miss Ellen Conway must be my excuse for addressing you concerning a matter that affects her nearly. She has, to our great distress, suddenly resolved upon leaving our roof—or rather the house that has for the last few months represented it—and on maintaining herself, in London, on her own slender resources and the small pecuniary aid which her pencil may afford her. Her reasons for this I need not go into; she is quite determined upon the subject, and will no doubt carry out her intention. It is in vain that we have besought her to accept, even for the present, such assistance from us as would at least put her above the necessity of practising what I fear must be called sordid economies. She will take nothing, she says, but what she earns or *to which she has a right*. The poor soul, though (as my wife says, who loves her like her own child) she deserves everything, has a right, as far as we know, to nothing. Still, it strikes us both that there is a course by which she may be benefited through your means, though, as I understand, she has refused to do so at your expense. I had the pleasure of reading the telegram to-day which announced your return for Slowcombe. Now, it is certain that a Member of the House of Commons can call attention to anything that has been done amiss far better than any private individual, and I venture to suggest therefore that you will press upon the Ministry, of which it seems you are a supporter, the propriety of doing something for Miss Conway in the way of pension. Her father, it is true, was not killed while on military service, and it was even urged, I believe, when the matter was before mooted, that he was put to death for a grave offence which insulted the whole Chinese nation through their religion, and, in short, admitted of no palliation, far less of recompense. You, however, will be in a position to state the facts of the case, which, from poor Nelly's own account of her father's character, I can scarcely believe are in accordance with these statements. You have already shown your willingness to assist this dear good girl with your purse; I am sure, therefore, you will not refuse—since that sort of private aid is distasteful to her—to give your voice to the advocacy of her claims in Parliament. No one so well knows as you do what actually occurred at Dhulang, and, as the nearest friend of her father, you are certainly the fittest man to undertake her cause. The poor girl has made up her mind to go to her old lodgings in Gower Street, the landlady of which is a kind motherly sort of woman, she says, and where, it seems, there is a room suitable for a studio. Her first step will be to

provide herself with some suitable drawing-master—so that she will have to educate as well as to clothe and feed herself upon what is, in fact, a mere pittance. The urgency of the case will therefore, I am sure, excuse my addressing you upon the matter.

I am, dear sir,
Yours truly,
JOHN WARDLAW.

'Now, what do you think of that?' said Ralph Pennicuick peevishly. 'You know this fellow well; *I* don't—at least, scarcely to nod to; and yet he writes to dictate to me what I am to do as soon as I take my seat in Parliament. I call it a most infernal liberty. As to Miss Nelly, I have not a word to say against her.' So furious was his mood, that he now remembered for the first time that there had been a love affair between the two young people. 'But I put it to you, Raymond; if you were in my place, would you not think it deuced hard?'

'However hard it was, father, I should take care that no effort of mine was wanting, were I you, to urge my dead friend's daughter's claim, as Mr. Wardlaw suggests. She, unhappily, refuses aid from those who would think it an honour and a pleasure to help her, and therefore there is no resource for her but a public grant. It is plain she will be in penury, if not in absolute want——'

'That's her own fault, sir,' broke in the other petulantly. 'She is too proud to take anybody's money, though, as you are a witness, I have offered her enough and to spare. Her view—quite contrary to that entertained by those who won't go into the workhouse—is that it is less humiliating to become a pensioner of the State.'

'I don't see that that is her view at all, sir. Mr. Wardlaw

takes it for granted that it is so, and that is all we know about it.'

'Very true; a very just remark, Raymond,' observed the other approvingly. 'We have no evidence that the young lady herself had any hand in this singular—this most unjustifiable—application. She may not even approve of it.'

'Very likely, sir; indeed, I feel confident that she is ignorant of Mr. Wardlaw's having written to you; and I think it only too likely that she would have scruples about making capital (as it may seem to her) out of her poor father's murder. I can easily imagine her shrinking from the public disclosures it would be necessary to make regarding the catastrophe itself.'

'And very right too,' put in the elder Pennicuick. 'Such feelings do her honour, and I would be the last man to wound them. Moreover, I will credit her with appreciating the great inconvenience that the course proposed would entail on me. Why, sir, I should have to demand of the Prime Minister a night all to myself to bring the matter before Parliament. Among the "notices of motion" you would see, "Ralph Pennicuick, to ask the Government why a pension has not been conferred on the orphan daughter of the late Captain Arthur Conway, put to death in March last by order of the Imperial Government of China," &c., &c. I shall be looked upon like one of those melancholy bores who insist upon having their say concerning the Begum of Badrapore and her hereditary claim of seven millions of rupees, and other horrid Indian matters. It would be making me supremely ridiculous, and be unspeakably distressing into the bargain. You must see that yourself.'

'It would be distressing, of course, sir, and doubtless disagree-

able in many ways,' answered Raymond gravely; 'but if you ask my opinion, and supposing the young lady is in favour of the application being made, it seems to me you have no option but to undertake it. Consider, sir, the position of this orphan girl in London, alone and unfriended, endeavouring to earn a scanty pittance by her pencil, while you, the nearest friend of her dead father, prosperous and in good position, do not stir a finger to help her. I am sorry to distress you, sir, but, believe me, I speak on your own account as much as upon hers; would not such a state of things, I say, give grounds, and apparently solid ones, for accusations which are now, thank Heaven, baseless and contemptible, but which in that case I, for my part, should blush to read?'

The expression of Ralph Pennicuick's face, who, at the commencement of this impassioned speech, had stared at his son with angry eyes, had wholly altered during its progress. It had worn such a look of mute appeal when Raymond painted Nelly's wretched condition, that you would have thought the description of it had pierced his listener's very heart (as indeed it did); and now, when Raymond spoke of what his own feelings would be if his father should refuse to urge Nelly's plea, should she herself desire it, it changed again to an expression of patient but pained submission.

'You are too impetuous, Raymond—far too impetuous, and you take advantage of my—what is the word?—yes, my failing health. But if the girl wishes it—mind that, if she really wishes it—and if you think it my duty, and if I am equal to it—you'll just write to Wardlaw for me and say *that*—if I am *equal* to it—the thing shall be done.—Now I think,' here his tones assumed their old petulance, 'you have done me enough of mischief for one morning,

and—oh, I have no doubt you didn't mean to kill me, but when one is out of health one doesn't want to be pulled down still lower by bad news and—and—disagreeable talk. And if you will kindly ring the bell, Raymond, Hatton will show you *out*.'

It was quite true that the young man's visit had done his father harm. When his son had left the room Ralph Pennicuick fell back in his chair as a dying man lies, at length, from sheer feebleness.

'They will kill me amongst them,' he murmured. 'I could never stand it—that speech in the House of Commons about *him*. It would be one lie from first to last. Alone and unfriended—a scanty pittance—and *his* daughter. It is frightful every way.' His face was so ghastly that, as he pulled out a drawer in the breakfast-table and produced a bottle, a looker-on would have said, 'Why, this man is going to put an end to his life.' It was, however, only some brandy, which he poured from the bottle into his cup of coffee, and drank with a trembling hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

GRIEF, it is said, does not always disincline ladies to love; indeed, there is a famous classical story—I am not classical myself, only devout, and I have read it as it appears in Jeremy Taylor—of a widow who, even while weeping over her husband's tomb, became filled with the tender passion for somebody else; and at all events, grief forbids mere flirtation and makes matters serious. So, in Miss Ellen Conway's case, though she never thought of Love, her very sorrows made her more accessible, as I have said, to one who, it was easy for anyone else but herself to see, had become her lover. To her the talk about her father and his fate was so incongruous with any notion of 'being courted,' that it did not occur to her that she was undergoing that operation; but Mr. Herbert Milburn was not for his part so overcome with melancholy but that he could think of other things than the Tomb—such as the Altar. Another thing, too, conduced to the young people being 'thrown together' more than would otherwise have been the case, namely, Miss Milburn's opposition. By Nelly it was simply disregarded; but 'dear Herbert' resented it exceedingly, and redoubled his attentions to his fair enslaver in consequence.

After a few weeks he was summoned to London again on

business for a day or two, and then it was for the first time that Nelly felt—through her sense of loss—how agreeable a companion he had been to her. If her mere affection for each had been weighed, it would probably have been found that she liked Mrs. Wardlaw much the better of the two; but then Milburn could sympathise with her, while her kind hostess could only pity and pet her. The young rogue affected to encourage her views of independence and artistic toil—though in his heart he intended to knock all such projects on the head by marrying her—while Mrs. Wardlaw utterly scoffed at them. 'She had no patience with such nonsense,' she said. 'What did Heaven send us friends for but to make use of them!'

There was a certain generous scorn about her, which I venture to think was as fine in its way as those Spartan precepts about living on a crust of one's own winning which Nelly preached, and indeed burnt to practise. She was getting convinced that her skill with her pencil was retrograding rather than improving, and that she must place herself under professional guidance.

In vain Mr. Herbert Milburn had recommended himself as a competent teacher. 'You draw no better than I do, sir, nor yet so well,' she had replied, which was quite true, as he laughingly acknowledged. Now that he was gone she missed his laugh, his gentle, earnest talk, and perhaps (though she would not have called it by that name) even his devotion.

More thoughtful than usual, but with her thoughts fixed on her future, not her past, she took her solitary way one afternoon along the shore. Some fancy—or it might be a disinclination to choose the favourite route that had so often been enlivened by Milburn's companionship—made her seek the southern bay, where the projecting cliffs were steep and high, and the beach level and sandy

without a stone. As she crossed the jetty she passed an artist at his work; his colour-box was on the stone step, and she inadvertently struck it with her foot. 'I beg your pardon, sir.'

'Nay, it was my fault, not yours,' said he.

The words were commonplace, but the voice attracted her by its exceeding gentleness. He was an old man—or rather looked like a man prematurely old; his brown hair and beard were plentifully streaked with grey, and his face was sharp and worn—as though it had been held to the grindstone by harsh Fate. His eyes, deep sunk in their sockets, flamed at her with an expression such as she had seen the hungry wear in sight of food exposed in shops, and which would have frightened her but for the softness of his speech. If the poor man looked mad—and that idea did strike her—he certainly looked harmless. He was long past the time of life at which landscape painters are seen sitting about in the late autumn, even at Sandybeach, and, judged by his attire, was far from prosperous. Perhaps at his age, thought she, it might come to pass she might have met with the same ill-success, and wear as despairing looks as he did.

He had risen as she passed, but sat down at once again very hastily: his shrunken limbs trembled excessively and seemed unable to support him. Nelly felt sorry for him, but her own sorrow presently monopolised her mind, and she forgot all about him; she forgot, too, the time, the place, and the warnings she had received not to linger in Blackness Bay during the spring tides. She was walking to and fro on the dry firm sand when suddenly she looked up and saw the two arms of the bay already projecting far into the sea, and the stern face of the sheer cliff cutting off her escape to landward. The wind was blowing fresh, and from the

south, that is towards Sandybeach, but she felt that she was too far from the village for a cry for help to reach it. Still she knew that was her only chance, for though there were ships in sight they were miles and miles away, and she could scarcely have been seen from them had she stood on the cliff against the sky instead of on the shore with the dark cliff behind her, which must have seemed almost one with her black dress. Her mind, always alive to 'colour,' seized on this fact almost as soon as it grasped the awful peril of her situation.

In all probability she was doomed to die. Before the sunset came and painted yonder ocean with its gorgeous hues, she would be lying beneath it. She was too young for this awful thought not to affect her exceedingly. Now that Death was so near she no longer yearned for it as she had seemed to do of late, but would have very willingly escaped it. She had no fears of the superstitious kind, but, strange to say, the idea that she was about to meet her parents, which hitherto had been so familiar to her, did not now occur to her. Her thoughts, after the first few moments of physical fear, wandered back instead of forward—to her childhood; the enclosed space—narrowing with such frightful speed—in which she found herself, reminded her of some familiar scene in which Raymond and she had been placed during a visit to some other point of the coast, and when they had 'made believe' to be in a similar danger. The cliffs in that case had been easily accessible, but it had been the children's fancy to suppose it otherwise. 'Now,' said Raymond, who was for ever reading books of peril and adventure, 'we must cry "Help," because that word goes far; and the way to cry it is this: turn your back to the wind, and hollow your two hands—so—and then shout.' Every word of good

advice is a seed that depends upon the soil on which it falls for life, and on occasion for development. Raymond's words seemed to fall upon her ear exactly as they had done half a score of years ago, and she put both her little hands together (firm they were as the fluted capital of a pillar), and shouted 'Help, help!' to the eager wind. It sped upon its course carrying this plaintive music with it, round the southern arm of the bay, till the sound grew faint and was left for dead upon the jetty.

Its last breath, however, caused the old artist, who was still sitting on the same step, to start up and listen. It would not have been so had he been attending to his work: but neither pencil nor brush had he touched since Nelly went by him two hours ago. He had been staring out to sea, and frowning and muttering to himself, and at times giving a great sigh and shutting his eyes, as though nothing was worth looking at: when presently over his face would steal a gentle smile, and the tears would fall two by two, without a sound.

He might not, as Nelly suspected, have had all his five senses about him, but he had certainly the sense of hearing; for, faint as it was, he had caught that inarticulate cry. It might have been the whimper of a sea-bird for all that he could gather from it, but it had been sufficient to arouse his earnest attention. He too, like Raymond, had read books of travel and adventure, or had perhaps, in visiting savage lands himself, had occasion to practise shifts and expedients, for he turned the curled brim of his wide-awake into the shape of what is called a coal-scuttle bonnet, and under that improvised sounding-board looked all ear.

Again the piteous sound came wailing round the point, and died like a ghost on the same spot, as it had died before; but

this time, because he had been waiting for it, he recognised it for what it was.

He started to his feet, and hurried down the sea-worn slippery steps of the jetty as well as his weak limbs would permit; when in motion you could see clearly how feeble and shattered was his frame. Indeed, since walking was such a toil to him, he had come even the short distance from Sandybeach in a boat, which lay moored close by.

He scrambled into this, and seized the oars with trembling hands. The wind was dead against him, and his arms were weak, but the will, as you could read in his glittering eyes, was strong within him, and in his first few strokes you saw that he was familiar with the oar. He had an oarsman's intelligence, too, for he urged the boat up to the promontory and then along under its lee, instead of making straight for its head. The rounding this against wind and tide was his difficulty, and it strained all his powers. The sweat came out upon his forehead, and his lungs laboured with his labouring arms, and for minutes—that seemed to him years—the issue hung in doubt, but at last he conquered and reached the comparatively smooth water of the bay beyond.

At the edge of its semicircle, on a mere ridge of sand which in a quarter of an hour would be sea, stood Nelly, with one hand fluttering a handkerchief, with the other shading her eyes as she gazed on the coming succour; directly she had caught sight of the black stem of the boat she had ceased to call for help. She felt sure that help was coming—if it could. The ridge of sand had contracted to a riband when the boat reached her, but she stepped into it dryshod. She was about to pour forth her thanks to her deliverer, but he put his finger to his lips; his face was wet, but,

notwithstanding his exertions, without a trace of colour; and his breath came in great gasps. 'Great heaven!' said she, 'you are killing yourself for my sake. I am strong—I can row; give *me* the oars.'

He muttered a faint protest, but she took them from his hand, and he tottered to the stern and sat down. The boat drew away from shore like an arrow, urged by her long steady strokes and by the favouring wind. She had learned how to use the oars from Raymond—the second accomplishment of his teaching which had stood her in good stead that day. Her companion's eyes regarded her with the same hungry look as before, but it no longer startled her.

When they had rounded the point, and found themselves under its protection, she ceased rowing. 'I owe you my life, sir,' said she simply. He bowed his head without speaking; but those flaming eyes began to soften, till the flame was quenched; he was weeping.

'I am ill and old,' said he, with a pained look; 'pray excuse my weakness.'

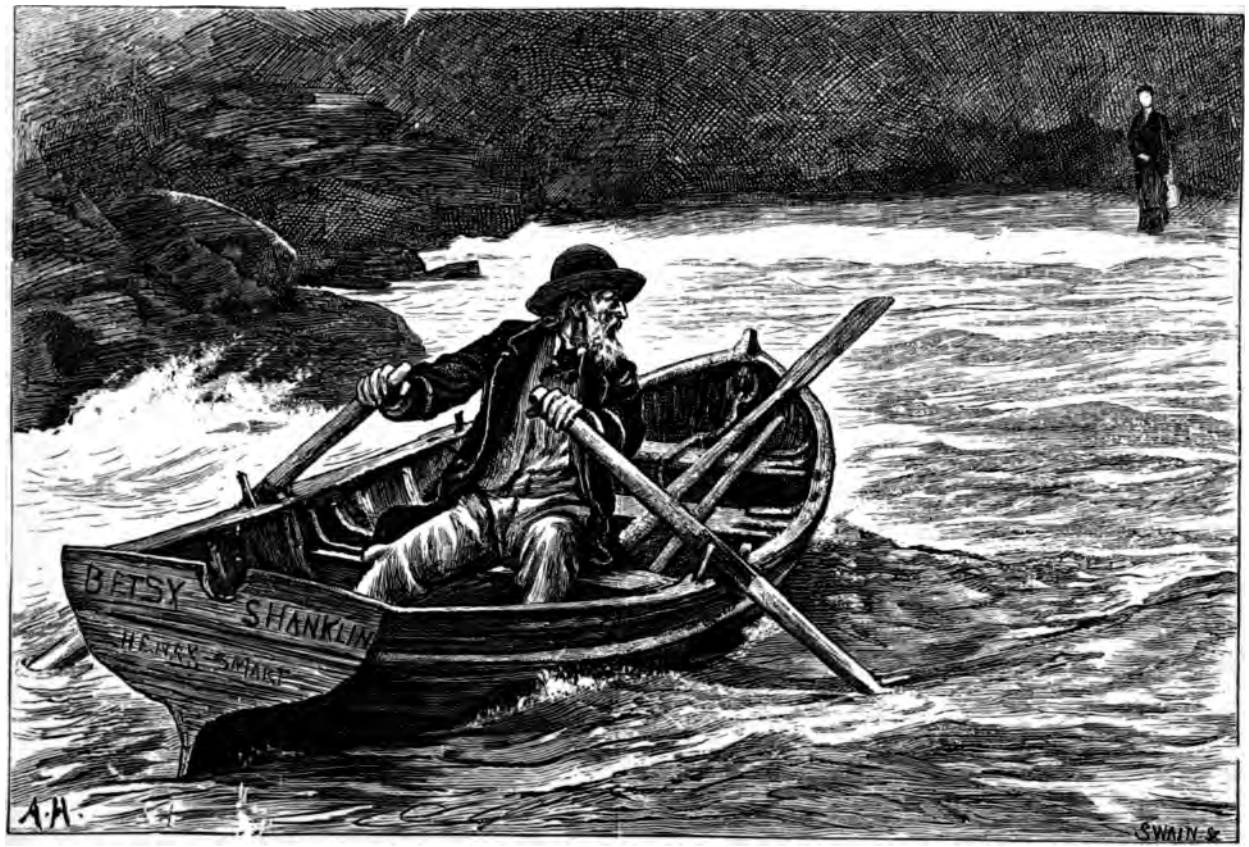
'It is your kindness, not your weakness. What am I to you, that you should have exerted yourself so nobly for my sake! How thankful I am that you are not a poor sailor, but a gentleman.'

'Why so?' he asked.

'Because you will need no recompense but the satisfaction of having done a generous action; if it were otherwise, and I gave you all I had, it would be but a small guerdon for so great a service.'

'You are poor, then?' said he sharply.

'Yes, quite poor. I am—or rather some day I hope to be—



'At last he conquered.'

an artist like yourself, only with me it will be working for bread.'

'Ah!'

It was but a monosyllable, but it was full of significance; it was pitiful, but it had also a sort of fierceness in it. It was evident to her that this poor man was eccentric, to say the least of it; but her gratitude was due to him even if he were a madman. 'Let me know the name of my deliverer,' said she earnestly.

'Pearson,' he answered; 'but you need not make so much of the matter; I heard you cry for help, and rowed across yonder. It took me half-an-hour, it is true; a few years ago it would have taken me five minutes.'

'You have been ill, then?'

'Yes, I was taken ill abroad; I am reduced to this;' he held out his skinny hand against the sun, which almost shone through it. 'Let us talk on a worthier subject—yourself. Who are you?'

'My name is Ellen Conway: I am an orphan, but I am staying here for the present with some kind friends, Mr. and Mrs. Wardlaw. You must come and receive their thanks, for they value her you have saved far beyond her merits.'

'They are good friends to you, then?'

'No one had ever better.'

'And rich?'

'Yes, they are very well off.'

'Rich and good friends, and yet you are poor, you say. I do not understand that sort of friendship.'

'Oh, it is not their fault; I could live with them all my life, I believe, if I were so minded; but I prefer to be independent.'

'And you have a talent with the pencil?'

'I sometimes think I have; at all events, I take a great pleasure in it. Perhaps it is hereditary, for my dear father did the like.'

'He was an artist, then?'

'No, a soldier.'

Her companion nodded and leant back in the stern with a weary air. Nelly took to her oars again, and in a few strokes brought the boat beside the jetty.

'You are staying at the hotel, I believe, Miss Conway?'

'Yes, I hope you will call, sir, or permit my friend Mrs. Wardlaw to call on you: I should be very sorry to lose sight of one to whom I owe so much.'

'My lodgings are not good enough to receive ladies in,' he answered simply; 'but I will certainly call at the hotel.'

Nelly held out her hand; he took it and carried it rapidly to his lips, which startled her a little.

Concealing her alarm, however, she wished him 'good-day' with a grateful smile, and walked quickly home.

Her adventure was commonplace enough, and would have been so even if it had ended fatally; but he who had shared it with her was certainly not a common character. It was difficult to guess his age, but she put it at about fifty-five; that he was ill and poor seemed certain; also that he was eccentric to an extreme degree: but she felt that he was a gentleman and had a good heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SECOND SUITOR.

It was not Nelly Conway's way to make much of any accident that befell her, but out of gratitude to Mr. Pearson she felt compelled to tell Mrs. Wardlaw how near she had been to Death, as well as to whom she owed her escape from it. That good lady was so horrified by the mere fact, that it was fortunate the narrator did not use any arts of embellishment. 'I should never, never have forgiven myself, dear Nelly, if anything had happened to you.'

'Why not, dear Mrs. Wardlaw? It would not have been your fault.'

'Yes, it would; for ever letting you go out of my sight. Does not this show how totally unfit you are to take care of yourself? And yet you used to talk of going away from us, and living all alone in London.'

That 'used to talk' was quite a Machiavellian touch: it suggested that this wild resolution of Nelly's had been given up ever so long ago, instead of being a project that pressed itself upon her daily, as Mrs. Wardlaw was well aware, though her guest had ceased to talk of it of late, as is often the case when we are on the brink of action.

'I can't be caught by the tide in London,' urged Nelly, 'unless I choose my lodgings down at Bankside.' The periodical inundations of the Thames, according to the last aquatic information, having just taken place in that locality.

This bantering rejoinder drew no answering smile from Mrs. Wardlaw. 'There was nothing to laugh at,' thought that kind old soul, in anything which had reference to Nelly's threatened departure.

'Well, at all events, it was not Mr. Pearson's fault that I was nearly drowned, but quite the reverse; so I hope you will be very kind to him,' said Nelly softly. 'He is an artist, but not, I fancy, very prosperous.'

'Not likely to be, my dear,' answered her hostess drily. 'Drawing and painting are all very well for those who can afford them, but as professions——'

'Hush!' The door opened. The servant announced 'A gentleman to see you, ma'am;' and in walked the very person in question. Mr. Pearson was dressed in the same time-worn summer suit which he had had on an hour or so ago, when Nelly had parted from him on the jetty; but even the hotel waiter had not mistaken his social position. His hat was in his hand, and the intelligence and delicacy of his features were more clearly seen; there was a hesitation in his manner, but it did not appear to arise from *mauvaise honte*, but seemed rather a personal characteristic.

Mrs. Wardlaw held out her hand to him at once, which seemed to reassure him.

'You have placed me, Mr. Pearson, under a very great obligation by preserving to me this dear girl.'

'That you should have a high regard for the young lady does

not astonish me,' said he; 'though as I understand, madam, she is no blood relation.'

'She is my adopted daughter,' said Mrs. Wardlaw, with quite a fierce look at Nelly, as much as to say, 'Contradict me if you dare.' If she could but be reduced to silence, the elder lady might not unreasonably assume some authority when the matter of the girl's departure should come to be seriously discussed.

'Mrs. Wardlaw is as kind to me as any mother could be,' said Nelly, whom experience had made alive to pitfalls of this kind, 'but I am not a party to the arrangement of adoption.'

'Why not?' inquired Mr. Pearson, not with conventional indifference, but as if he was really anxious to know.

'Well, I have the filial love, but not the sense of filial duty,' said Nelly naïvely. 'I don't mind her petting me, but then I want to have my own way.'

'Very natural,' said the visitor approvingly.

'What!' interrupted Mrs. Wardlaw with indignation.

'But, as I was about to add, madam, very wrong. When a young girl is left without father or mother, and (as she has informed me) scanty means, why should she refuse the help of loving hands? Ah, dear young lady, Poverty, like Death, has its charms when at a distance, but when it comes near us——look at me.'

There was light enough yet to see his threadbare clothes, his parched and weary face, the hollow eyes that bespoke want as well as weakness; but light enough also (for those who could see them) to mark the pride and independence of his look and mien.

'You are an honest man,' said Mrs. Wardlaw warmly, 'and you

know what you are talking about. May this dear girl have the wisdom to lay your words to heart!'

'At the same time,' continued he, 'the bread of dependence can never be so sweet as that we earn. You tell me, Miss Conway, that you trust to your pencil to do something for you. I have some judgment in such matters—though, it is true, my own want of success may inspire little confidence. Might I see your drawings?'

Nelly ran upstairs at once to bring down her portfolio. Brief as was her absence, there was time enough for the visitor to say with hurried eagerness, 'She will leave you, Mrs. Wardlaw, and take her own way; she will fail in her object, but she will not confess it; she will suffer—and make no sign; you must never lose sight of her.'

'Bless the man! as if I *should*! Hush, here she is!'

'So these are your art-treasures, are they, young lady?' said he cheerfully, as Nelly placed the portfolio before him, and then sat down, in modest confusion, a little ashamed of her prompt acceptance of his criticism. But then she was anxious to 'improve' and be corrected in her faults. 'Well, there is plenty of promise; plenty—dear me, what's this in silver paper? a gem, no doubt?'

'Oh, please, I did not mean that for a specimen,' said Nelly with a sudden flush.

'Why not? it's very creditable; a quaint old garden, and a house of Queen Anne's time.'

'It is our old house at Richmond: I did it for my poor father as a present on his birthday—and—and—' here she burst into tears and ran out of the room.

The events of the afternoon had been a severer mental strain than at the time she had felt them to be. Her nerves were altogether unstrung.

'Her father met his death in China under the saddest circumstances,' explained Mrs. Wardlaw in low tones. 'It is too shocking to talk about. She is quite upset, you see; but I know she had rather be left alone, and presently she will come back again all right.'

'Poor girl, poor soul! and this was done for her father, was it, and he never lived to see it? It's a pretty picture, but the sentiment is above all art. She wouldn't part with it now, I dare say, for anything.'

'I should think not. Why, John—that's my husband—offered her ever so much for it, but she wouldn't have sold it him for ten times its weight in gold. She doesn't much like it even to be looked at, though she did show it the other day to Mr. Milburn.'

'Milburn?' inquired Mr. Pearson. 'What Milburn?'

'Oh, a gentleman who is staying at the hotel. A very nice young fellow—Herbert is his christian name. Do you know him?'

Mr. Pearson shook his head. 'I thought it might have been a man I knew in India, but on reflection it cannot be he. Is she fond of him?'

'What, Nelly of Mr. Milburn? Well, really, one doesn't talk of such things.'

'"Not to strangers," you would say: of course not. Only I feel such an interest in this young lady from having seen her in such a strait as I did this afternoon: within a few minutes of being drowned, and yet so calm and quiet.'

'Ah, because she's so "fit to go," that's it, Mr. Pearson. Well,

since you saved her life, you have some right to hear about her. I am in hopes this Mr. Milburn may win her heart. It would be an excellent match for her; but there has been some hitch upon her side. Girls are so strange. I think, however, she seems to miss him since he went away.'

'He is not here, then, at present?'

'No, he comes back to-morrow: you will then see them together, and be able to judge for yourself.'

'I suppose such a pretty girl has been sought after, notwithstanding her want of fortune, by other suitors?'

'Well, between ourselves, by one person only. It's a sad business. His father has stepped in between the young people. He is a hard man—but still it is not to be wondered at. Nelly has not a shilling, and the young man will be very rich when his father dies. It is the Mr. Ralph Pennicuick who is standing for Slowcombe. He was a great friend of Captain Conway's, nevertheless—that was Nelly's father.'

'Then he has not been a friend of his child?'

'Well, no; I don't call him a friend. It is true he offered her an annuity after her mother's death, but she declined it.'

'Why so?' he inquired again with that air of genuine interest which seemed to excuse what would have otherwise appeared to be mere vulgar curiosity.

'Well, you see how independent she is: she would probably not have taken it in any case, but it was offered, I fancy, ungraciously. If I were to say to Nelly, "Here is a five-pound note, but understand at the same time that you have no claim upon me," that would be very brutal.'

'But it would be the truth,' said the other drily.

'Perhaps so: but I would rather never speak truth again than say such a thing.'

'Your husband should be a worthy man, madam.'

'John? I should think so! No better man breathes. But what makes you say that?'

'Because he has a noble wife.'

'La! well, I'm sure!' said Mrs. Wardlaw; and she looked very much relieved as Nelly re-entered the room. It began to strike her, as it had struck her young friend before, that their visitor was a little eccentric.

'I have looked through your drawings, my dear young lady, and I think you want nothing but good teaching——'

'Which she shall have wherever and whenever she likes,' put in poor Mrs. Wardlaw, never forgetting the word in season.

'To turn out a good artist,' continued Mr. Pearson.

'Since you are stopping here, why cannot *you* be her master?' inquired Mrs. Wardlaw boldly.

'Alas, I am not even my own master,' returned the other gravely. 'And I am called elsewhere even now.' He rose from his chair as he spoke.

'I wish you could see John,' said Mrs. Wardlaw, who had confidence in her husband's 'business head.' 'If it's a question of terms, I am sure there will be no difficulty, and he'll be back by the express to-night.'

Mr. Pearson shook his head.

'Well, perhaps you'll give us a line by post, just to say where you are likely to be: even a word or two of advice to Nelly—

good advice,' she added significantly—'that will be very welcome, won't it, my dear?'

'I can't write,' sighed Mr. Pearson. He had muttered the remark, as he thought, to himself, but they had both heard it.

'He must be certainly mad,' thought Mrs. Wardlaw, 'to say he can't write!'

'At least it is very painful to me,' added the visitor, touching his right hand.

'Then how terrible it must have been to you to pull that boat out to my rescue!' said Nelly tenderly.

'Oh, it was nothing—and soon over,' answered he, smiling; 'and then, you know, you pulled *me* back.'

'What a mercy it is that you can draw with it!' observed Mrs. Wardlaw, looking at his hand, which, though thin and delicate, showed no sign of hurt.

'True, yes: one feels what is amiss, but one overlooks one's advantages. I can just make shift to draw.' Then after a pause he added, 'Though I am obliged to go, ladies, I hope to see you again some day.'

'I hope it will be soon,' said Mrs. Wardlaw warmly.

'Whether I see you or not, Mr. Pearson, I shall not forget you, nor what I owe you,' added Nelly earnestly.

She could hardly say less, yet her manner was so grateful that she could hardly have expressed more. He said good-bye to each of them, and was gone.

'What a strange man!' exclaimed Mrs. Wardlaw.

'A very good and kind one, I am sure,' said Nelly.

'I have no doubt about it: but I wish he was a little more like other people.'

'He has had troubles, I fear, which have broken him.'

'But they can't have broken his wrist; or if they have, how is it that he can paint and yet not write; *that* is what seems to me so queer. By the by, did you see him paint?'

'Yes: at least, I saw his colour-box, because I was so clumsy as to tread upon it.'

'Well, it is very mysterious: and I wish John had been here.'

Mr. Wardlaw arrived in due time, according to promise, and, as it happened, Mr. Milburn with him.

'I was able,' the latter explained at dinner-time, 'to escape from the lawyers a day earlier than I had hoped.'

'How nice of you it was, dear Herbert,' said his sister gushingly, 'to come back again to me as soon as you could.'

'Dear Herbert' did not reply to this, and Miss Milburn, who detected a sly smile upon Mrs. Wardlaw's face, looked anything but pleased.

If Mr. Milburn's personal presence had been dispensed with, his attention was still a good deal occupied by business affairs. Not a day passed without deeds and documents passing and repassing through the post, in all of which his sister took a family pride, and talked sympathisingly about the trouble there always was in settling matters connected with large landed estates. This continued for a week or two, during which the intimacy of the two families increased by time rather than circumstance, and Miss Milburn kept watch and ward over her brother as though he had been an enchanted princess for whom marriage had been foretold to be fatal, and she herself were an incorruptible dragon.

It was Nelly's custom to take a walk before breakfast, when

the sands, except in the immediate neighbourhood of the bathing machines, were as deserted as those of Sahara, and the roar or whisper of the waves was the only noise to be heard. She was returning one morning from her favourite bay, when she saw Mr. Milburn coming towards her. He was a late riser, and had expressed in her presence his astonishment at her own heroic conduct in taking these matutinal walks: and at the sight of him she felt her face flush. She had as little vanity as it is possible for a pretty girl to have, but she knew why he was to meet her, and what he was about to say. She saw as they drew nearer one another that his face wore a more earnest look than usual, and yet that it had an expression of unrest about it: a combination she had noticed once before in the face of another man.

'You are very courageous, Mr. Milburn,' said she, smiling—for a woman has always a smile and a tear handy—'thus to dare the morning air.'

'Yes, I am courageous,' he quietly said; 'perhaps even to audacity. Would you mind turning back with me, Miss Conway, just for a hundred yards or so?'

He little knew that he was leading her back to the very spot where Raymond Pennicuick had told to her—in vain—the same old story that he himself was about to tell again, or he would surely have avoided it as of evil omen.

They walked on for a few steps in silence, which becoming intolerable to Nelly, as well it might, she broke by a reference to his sister.

'Miss Milburn told us yesterday that all your business had at last been settled; so I suppose you feel quite a gentleman at large?'

'It has not all been settled, dear Miss Conway; but it will be so before I get home again; and how it is to be done will depend on you.'

'On *me*?' said she gaily, but with a weight about her heart that sank it very low. 'I am afraid my advice on such matters will not be worth much.'

'Your decision on the point will nevertheless be final. This estate, that Catherine talks so much about, but which is no such great matter after all, has a "mansion" upon it (as the auctioneers call it), which is at present a millstone about my neck. I am to decide to-day whether I am to live in it or to let it. If the former, I shall sell out of the regiment and become, as you say, a gentleman at large; if the latter, I shall return at once to China.'

'Indeed!' said she with genuine interest. She felt that she should be seriously sorry if this bright, kind young fellow should leave England, when in all probability they would never meet again.

'Yes. If I stay in this country, and reside at my own place, it will certainly not be alone, nor with my sister: she is a good creature, but I feel that we could not live for ever under the same roof. But if, my dear Miss Conway, you would consent to be its mistress, then I should be the happiest man, I do believe, in England. Take time, take time, I do beseech you' (for he read rejection in her eyes), 'for if you say "No," that will mean exile, probably for all my life. I was your father's friend——'

'Mr. Milburn, I entreat you to say no more,' interrupted the girl earnestly. 'I ask it for both our sakes; I appeal to a nature that I know is as unselfish as it is kind to spare yourself and *me*. I am deeply sensible of the honour you would confer upon me, and of which I am wholly unworthy; but I cannot accept it. I do not

mean to marry. I have had troubles such as you cannot understand——'

'But I said "Take time, take time,"' broke in the young man eagerly. 'I know you have had cruel trials, from which, at present, you have not recovered. It was wrong of me to speak so soon, but my love must be my excuse.'

'You need no excuse, Mr. Milburn; though, indeed, that you have thought so seriously of one like me, surprises me. If I have given you cause to—to——' She blushed and hesitated, her mind reverting to his sister and her innuendoes.

'No, you have given me no cause,' said he; 'it is Nature herself which has made you so adorable. I have said that I was audacious in my hopes, but tell me at least that I need not despair.'

'Mr. Milburn, you have been very kind to me. I believe you are a good man, and I respect you with my whole heart; but, once for all, I cannot marry you.'

'It is enough. I have no right to ask you another question, yet I must put it for my own sake; for if your answer is what I believe it will be, hope will still be left to me—as it is left, they say, even to the most wretched. I am, it seems, not personally distasteful to you. Is the cause of my rejection that you love another?'

Her lips moved, though without any articulate sound. Her face flushed from brow to chin. She cast down her eyes. Her answer was very plain to read. Milburn bit his lips—his face, unlike hers, was very pale—and bent his head. It was his submission to his fate. 'Let us go back to the hotel,' he said; 'you must not keep your friends waiting for breakfast. Do not cry, I beseech you. I am not worth a tear from your eyes.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS MILBURN EXPRESSES APPROVAL.

It was with profound distress that Nelly Conway had received and rejected the offer of Milburn's hand, for she had no doubt that his heart would have gone with it. It would have pained her to have so behaved to any honest young fellow, but, in truth, she had a great liking for this one, though it had no touch of love about it. It was plain to her that her departure from Sandybeach, on which she had so long determined, could be no longer delayed if Mr. Milburn should stay on there; and though, indeed, that was not probable, for he would be sure to feel the delicacy of her position, and hasten to relieve her of his presence, yet what right had she—who in any case had meant to go—to drive him to such a step? That very day, therefore, without stating her immediate reasons for her resolution, she informed her kind host and hostess of her intention to go to town at once, and begin the life of independence she had always determined upon. There was a terrible scene of tears and tender pleading, which would have carried conviction, had she needed it, of how dear she had become to both these excellent people.

'It'll go near to break my old woman's heart,' said Mr. Wardlaw, in a tone that showed his own was not quite bomb-proof.

'Oh, never mind *me*,' sobbed his wife; 'when I'm dead and gone she'll be sorry, and I dare say will come back to you, John, and make the tea, and put out the flowers, and play toons to you on the piano, just as she used to do.' The recollection of these tender services, which were no longer, it seemed, to be performed by her darling, utterly overcame the good lady.

'I am sorry that any poor thing we were able to do for you,' said Mr. Wardlaw simply, 'should have the sense of obligation about it. We didn't—neither of us—mean it to be so, Miss Nelly, I do assure you.'

'Oh, I am sure you didn't, and I never did feel it so,' cried the poor girl. 'It is your very goodness and kindness that make me want to go.'

'Then we'll be very hard and grumpy, won't we, missus? We'll do our very best to be unkind to you, indeed, though just at first, perhaps, my old woman here will find it a little difficult.'

'Not more difficult than you would, Mr. Wardlaw. Of course I don't mean exactly what I said. I have been made so happy by your kindness, but it has placed me in a false position. I feel myself getting less and less fitted—because you spoil me so—to make my own way in the world; and so I must needs set about it at once.'

As in all discussion in which the affections mingle, the arguments were various and discursive; but Nelly maintained her point: it was settled that she was to go to town, and, residing, if possible, at the old lodgings in Gower Street, to there pursue her studies. She wrote that day to the proprietor of the 'Fine Arts' establishment at Richmond, who had been her earliest patron, to inquire as to some drawing-master whose charges should be within

Nelly and Miss Milburn

her slender means. As a supplement to his teaching, it was her purpose to attend the classes at South Kensington.

Having got over the first and worst difficulty—that of wrenching herself from her generous friends—Nelly felt somewhat more composed in mind; but the need of solitude after so much mental struggle was imperative. For the second time that day she took a walk alone. On this occasion she went inland, as being the less likely route on which to meet people, and especially Mr. Milburn; she chose a footpath through the fields that led to the high down-land above the village, and on the down she walked for miles with untiring feet, in a clear wind that blew the sea-gulls about the skies, and the weariness and worry out of her brain. In youth nature will do this for us, but in old age the sunshine and the breeze fall but as rain upon a stony soil.

On her way down she saw a female figure coming up the path; by the daintiness with which she crossed the stiles and picked her way she knew it was Miss Milburn, and would gladly have avoided the rencontre. There was a little wood between them, through which were two paths, one direct and the other leading to a small farm, and so by a circuit to the same point of egress. Nelly took the longer route, calculating that this lady would take the other, but, when she emerged, there was her friend seated on the stile, and dinting the soft ground with the point of her parasol.

'My dear Miss Conway, I am so glad to have found you,' cried she, with enthusiasm. 'Indeed, I came out on purpose. I felt that I could never have sat down to dinner, or have met you in any cold or formal way, as usual, without expressing to you what I felt: without telling you how admirably, how nobly, you have behaved!'

'I am glad to hear I have earned your good opinion, Miss Milburn,' said Nelly coldly; 'but I am at a loss to know what I have done to deserve it.'

'Well, it is not what you have done, so much as what you have not done: not one girl in a thousand, in your position, would have resisted such a temptation. To see the incongruity of things, and the impropriety of any line of conduct in the presence of a great advantage, is given to so very few people.'

'You speak in riddles,' answered Nelly: her tones were ice; her face was stone.

'Ah, there again you are so judicious; you are *quite* right to keep dear Herbert's secret as though it were your own: only, as it happens, he has told me everything.'

'Everything!' repeated Nelly slowly. He surely, surely, could never have told this woman that sacred secret which she had hidden from every eye but his, and only revealed to him in merciful kindness.

'Oh, yes; how you refused him, though he actually offered to make you mistress of the old Hall. It was a most imprudent impulse, but, there! you had the good sense to see it in its right light. Most fortunately—as I told him—you were a girl of independent spirit, and who understood the fitness of things. He will understand it himself if he has time for thought, and is let alone. Then, what a comfort it will be to you to reflect that you acted as you have done. My dear Miss Conway, it may seem a liberty, but if you knew how gratified I feel for your conduct to dear Herbert —might I kiss you?'

'I really don't see any reason why you should,' said Nelly, drawing herself back from the threatened embrace.

'Well, at all events you may count upon me to be your friend for life.'

'You are very good, but I am afraid there will be few opportunities of our meeting in future. Our ways will lie far apart. It will be my lot to earn my own living—if, indeed, I am able to succeed in that—while you——'

'One moment!' interrupted Miss Milburn sprightlily: 'never mind about me, for I'm nobody in this matter: I am only thinking of dear Herbert. You have often talked, you know, about earning your own living, but in the mean time you continue to remain here with Mr. and Mrs. Wardlaw.'

'Well?'

'What I was about to say is a little embarrassing, my dear Miss Conway,' continued the other, and it must be confessed by no means in her usual style, which was florid and flowing. 'Indeed, if I was not certain that your good sense would insure its being taken as it is intended, as a friend's advice, I could hardly mention it: but the fact is, so long as you remain at Sandybeach, there will be still danger.'

'To whom?'

'Well, really you are quite abrupt: I mean, of course, to dear Herbert. You have behaved admirably, and, as it were, saved him from himself: but he is not yet—ahem—well—' she looked towards the coppice and found a metaphor—'out of the wood. It is possible he may himself fly from temptation: I recommended that course to him very strongly, but then men are *so* weak. What I wish to ask you —and I know it is a great favour—would *you* mind going away?'

'As it happens, Miss Milburn,' said Nelly quietly, 'I am going away to-morrow or the next day at latest. I am bound to say,

however, that, if it had not been so, your request would not have moved me. I think it officious, I think it impertinent, and to the last degree unbecoming in—I will not say a lady—but any woman.'

Nelly's blood was fairly up; she mounted the stile with a vigour that rather alarmed her late companion, who made room for her with great alacrity, and hurried home.

It was very well that she was going; that she had thoroughly made up her mind to leave Sandybeach, and informed others of it, or she felt as though she must have stayed, in sheer defiance of that insolent request.

However, there was one good thing about it; it had reminded her, in a manner not easily to be forgotten, of her own position in the world, of the humility of which, at times, she had perhaps been in danger of losing sight. It was high time that she should begin life upon a genuine basis.

On the day after the morrow she would receive a definite answer from the lodging-house keeper; indeed, such had been her haste to escape from Sandybeach, that she had begged her to telegraph in case of the house being full, so that she might lose no time in applying elsewhere. How much better it would have been could she have fled at once, that very morning, and so escaped the unmannerly and insulting advice of Catherine Milburn!

As it happened, that lady might, after all, have spared herself the trouble—and perhaps even the pain—of making herself so disagreeable, for when she got home to the hotel she found her brother had in her absence quitted it for London. He had confided to her the fact of his rejection, simply to account for his departure, which he had intended to take in her company, but the manner in which she had received his news was so offensive to him (though

she was quite unconscious of it) that he had felt her society to be for the present insupportable. He left word that she should join him in town, whither business had suddenly summoned him, so soon as she heard from him again.

'How *very*, *very* weak he is!' was his sister's reflection. 'He evidently dare not trust himself near the girl, for fear he should make a fool of himself a second time, and not so easily escape. I wonder what induced her to reject him! It is plain, from her late impertinent behaviour to me, that it was from no proper sense of the superiority of his position. Is it possible, I wonder, that she is married already? Well, at all events, he has made himself safe, and for that one cannot be too thankful.'

A telegram did come on the morrow to Nelly from Gower Street, but it was to say that the rooms she had fixed on—one of which was adapted for a studio—were not let, but at her disposal; and she resolved to migrate thither the next day.

It was this determination of hers that caused Mr. Wardlaw to write the letter to Ralph Pennicuick with the contents of which we are acquainted, her host and hostess having attempted in vain to persuade her to accept from them any pecuniary aid. On the morning of her departure she got a communication from the proprietor of the 'Fine Arts' depository at Richmond, which interested and excited her much. Its reception had the great and immediate good of diverting her mind from the pain of parting with her loving friends, which had wrung her very heart-strings, and seemed at the last moment to be greater than she could bear. The letter from Richmond was as follows:—

In reply to your inquiry, I have the honour to tell you that I think I know of a teacher who will suit your purpose. He is not perhaps a first-rate

artist, but he draws and paints very well, and indeed the best things I have now in my establishment are the work of his pencil. He came to reside here—I suppose for the river scenery—about three weeks ago, but has since gone to town; he left his London address with me for the very purpose of my recommending to him a pupil or two—and I enclose it with much pleasure. His terms, as you see, are very moderate, and I believe him to be thoroughly competent. After all, it is quite possible you may know him yourself, for I seem to fancy he spoke of you, or at all events of Mr. and Mrs. Wardlaw (to whom I offer my respectful compliments), when he first called on me.

The card enclosed bore the name of Mr. William Pearson, Teacher of Drawing, &c., Bedford Place, and also his terms for attending at pupils' private houses.

It was a common name enough, but still the probability was that this Mr. Pearson was identical with the very man who had saved Nelly's life but three days ago, and who had certainly made a very favourable impression on her and Mrs. Wardlaw. If this was so, the initial difficulty of procuring a teacher was not only got over, but that teacher was just the one the girl would have chosen for herself had the choice been offered her.

On the other hand, Mrs. Wardlaw had 'fished' for *that* Mr. Pearson, with the very view of employing him as Nelly's master, and he had answered, 'Alas, I am not even my own master;' but perhaps that had only meant that he could not teach out of London. At all events, this communication gave her matter for thought throughout the journey, prevented her from dwelling (not without sharp stings of conscience) upon those she had left behind her, and gave her hope that not quite everything in the hard life that lay before her would be new and strange.

CHAPTER XIX.

TUTOR AND PUPIL.

As honour cannot heal a wound, though it may help us to get one, so determination cannot make soft the bed which it has compelled us to lie on. It can only enable us to endure hardness. Very bare and melancholy looked the old lodging-house in Gower Street to poor Nelly's eyes, when she re-entered it as her own mistress; lonely and full of bitter memories, though the rooms she had taken were not those which her mother and herself had tenanted of yore. Her bedroom looked now to the front, and the parlour, which was to be her studio, to the back, where a long strip of desolate garden ground ran out, and was terminated by a dead wall. Mrs. Hansel, the landlady, was indeed profuse in her welcome, and even didactic also—it was a credit both to landlady and lady, she said, when 'a party' came back to their old quarters as in this case—but Nelly missed Mrs. Wardlaw's loving looks, and the kind and cheerful accents of her honest spouse. Upon the whole, she had not felt so miserable since her father's death; for at her mother's there were hopes for her still, though she had tried to persuade herself otherwise. But now there was no hope that a young girl could call such. The knowledge that she had given sorrow to two noble natures, as she believed those of Raymond and Mr. Milburn to be,

was no slight addition to her sense of woe, which was indeed almost overwhelming.

There had been young and delicately nurtured women before her, doubtless, who in lonely London lodgings, friendless and almost moneyless, had been sustained by strong ambition and had lived to justify their aspirations. But she felt that hers was not one of those exceptional characters; she had no conviction of success, no consciousness of genius to support her. If these even fell short of their ideal, they attained to *something*; their art, their talent, at least procured them a due subsistence: but in Nelly's case to procure this had become her chief if not her highest aim, and if she fell short of it, she would fail miserably indeed. Her practice with her brush at Sandybeach had much disheartened her; she had observed the sketches of others, who themselves had made no particular mark in the world, to be much superior to her own; she could not do much better than even Mr. Milburn, who was but a desultory amateur, while that little sketch, slight as it was, from her father's hand, which she had become possessed of, was infinitely beyond her powers. Yet she had never heard him spoken of as having any especial skill as an artist. It was plain that her only chance was application and incessant work, and that very evening she despatched a line to Mr. Pearson to ask him to call upon her. 'If you are the same gentleman that I met at Sandybeach,' she wrote, 'it will be a happy chance for me indeed should you have a little time for teaching at your disposal.'

She received no reply the next day, nor the next, and almost in despair she took counsel of Mrs. Hansel as to what should be done.

'Well, Janet shall step round with you and call upon the

gentleman, if you please, Miss; for you see you couldn't well go alone.'

Nelly had not seen this, having been deterred from that course by shyness rather than by any sense of impropriety, but she at once acknowledged to herself that the good woman was right. Suppose this Mr. Pearson should turn out to be a stranger, or indeed in any case, it would not have been becoming.

'But is your daughter well enough to walk so far?' said Nelly, for poor Janet was an invalid, a little deaf, and somewhat lame.

'Oh yes, it will do her good to walk a little way, the doctors say: and the poor dear is so pleased when she can make herself useful. It is mostly but sitting work as she can do, and she can keep company with you, Miss, if you please—and do her needlework all the same—when your tutor comes.' Here was a difficulty (which had never occurred to Nelly) at once suggested and got over. At the same time it impressed her unpleasantly with a sense of her own ignorance of the world and her general incompetence. What mistakes might she not commit, what precautions might she not overlook! How difficult was the whole course of life before her, and how unskilled she was to navigate it!

That very afternoon Mr. Pearson called, and delighted indeed was she to find in him her Sandybeach preserver. Her pleasure, however, was damped at seeing him look so ill and worn.

'I have only just got your letter, my dear young lady,' said he kindly, 'or you may be sure you would have seen me earlier. I have been out of town on business.'

'I fear you have been working too hard, Mr. Pearson; it seems quite selfish in me to wish to add to your labours.'

'Nay, drawing and painting never hurt me; I have had other

work on hand of a more harassing nature: but that is over now, at all events for the present. To teach you will be a great pleasure. How strange it is that we should meet again in this manner!'

'It is most fortunate for *me*,' said Nelly simply.

'I hope so, I trust so. Miss Conway, consider me your friend as much as your tutor. If I am saying too much, forgive me—but after what happened down at the seaside, it seems as if Fortune intended me to be of service to you.'

'It does indeed,' said Nelly gratefully.

There was something in this poor artist which inspired her with trust and confidence. He was so outspoken and so frank—on everything except his own troubles—that a less unsuspicious person than herself might have well believed in him.

When Janet came into the room, and dropped into a chair with her needlework in her hand, Mr. Pearson raised his eyebrows, then murmured, 'To be sure,' and sighed. Nelly was not the least afraid of him, but the sense of his eccentricity did not wear off by any means. It seemed to her that the expression of premature age in this poor man, his pre-occupation, strange looks and incoherent talk, were all the result of trouble. In his teaching—for she took her first lesson then and there—he was very quiet and patient. In the middle of it, a letter came for her, which being marked 'immediate,' she asked leave to open: otherwise she would have postponed the reading of it till she was alone—for the handwriting was that of Raymond Pennicuick.

'You seem disturbed,' said Mr. Pearson gently. 'You have had no bad news, I hope?'

'No: not exactly.'

'You said I might be your friend, Miss Conway,' continued her companion earnestly. 'If the matter is one in which I can be of any help, I need not say I am at your service.—Let me see the letter.'

He took it out of her unresisting hand. It was a great liberty, of course, yet she experienced no sense of resentment. There was something in his manner so genuinely kind and honest, that it was impossible to be offended with him. Moreover, she felt the need of advice and sympathy as she had never felt it before. She had not a friend on earth, as it happened, who could give her an opinion upon the matter in question, without bias or prejudice.

'Dearest Nelly,' ran the letter. 'My father hears from Sandybeach that you have left your friends, and come to live in London alone, in hopes to earn your own living. I make no remark on this, because you know beforehand how I must regard such a course of conduct, how my heart bleeds for you when I think of the loneliness you must at present feel, and of the hard things that must be in store for you. I hate myself, because I am at this moment in the midst of luxuries and comforts, and you are in your melancholy lodgings alone. However, I have no right, alas, to interfere in your arrangements. What I now write about is a communication that my father has received from Mr. Wardlaw. He urges upon him, now that he is in Parliament, that his first duty is to bring your poor father's case under the notice of the Government, in order that some sort of provision should be made for you. As you have refused all assistance, even from those whose greatest happiness it would be to serve you, it is possible that even the idea of a government pension may be disagreeable to you. But I venture to think that you are bound to consider other things than your own feelings in the matter. If I wished to be selfish, I might urge that your acquiescence in this plan would give my father an opportunity of publicly rebutting certain infamous though vague charges which have been recently made against him in the newspapers concerning his conduct at Dhulang: but I prefer to press upon you a less personal argument. I would remind you that various more or less distorted accounts have got abroad respecting the catastrophe that happened to Captain Conway; and that you owe it to his memory to have the matter placed in its true light. From all that I know or have heard of his character and

disposition, it is inconceivable that he should have committed the indiscretion which cost him his life in the manner represented. The subject is so painful to the only person who can speak upon it, that even I myself am unacquainted with the details, but from what has dropped from him on the subject, I am sure it was a very, very hard case. Your kind heart will at once suggest, "But will it not be still more painful to that person to have to discuss the matter in public?" To that, I answer, No; or rather, that though it will undoubtedly be distressing, the result, when it is once over, will be beneficial. As it is, I am confident that the malicious innuendoes which the newspapers opposed to my father's politics have been vile enough to publish, are having a most prejudicial effect upon his health and spirits. His state is so grievous and deplorable, indeed, that I hardly like to dwell upon it. What I adjure you to do for all our sakes is this: write a few lines to my father, just to say that his intention of bringing Captain Conway's case before the notice of Parliament has reached your ears, and that it has your thorough approbation.

'I remain, dearest Nelly,
'Yours faithfully,
'RAYMOND PENNICUICK.'

'I have heard something of this,' said Mr. Pearson gravely, as he folded up the letter. 'The young gentleman's arguments are specious enough, but we must remember that he is an interested person.'

'You are wrong there, Mr. Pearson,' said Nelly warmly; 'he has not a grain of selfishness in him. On the contrary, what I fear is that all his reasoning is used to hide his earnest desire to see me independent; in short, that I should get the pension.'

'Ah! and then, perhaps, he would like to win the pensioner.'

'You are most unjust,' cried Nelly, so vehemently that Janet dropped her work, and stared at her in mute astonishment. 'You do not know Raymond Pennicuick—nor me.'

'To be sure, that is true,' answered the other quietly. 'I was merely guided by one's ordinary experience of human nature. It is so rare to find young men "without a grain of selfishness." After

all, perhaps my ignorance of the individuals in question may not make my opinion upon the matter in hand less valuable. Let me think about it while you go on with your drawing.'

Nelly's fingers were still trembling with indignation, but she did her best to comply with this request, while Mr. Pearson, chin in hand, and with his hollow eyes turned upon the leafless garden, gave himself up to reflection.

'If the writer of that letter is, as you say, to be depended upon,' said he presently, 'if his statement of facts is genuine, you seem to me, my dear young lady, to have no choice but to act upon it. One point alone, on which he very justly dwells, appears to me to be conclusive.'

'You mean, that I owe it to my father's memory.'

Mr. Pearson bowed his head. 'It is of course a matter of feeling. Since, as I learnt from Mrs. Wardlaw, you never knew him personally from your childhood, it is possible this consideration may not weigh with you—and very naturally—as it would weigh with some daughters.'

'Mr. Pearson,' said Nelly earnestly, 'you misjudge me. Never was father more loved by daughter than mine by me. We were separated, indeed, by distance, but we were not divided; my heart clung to him—and still clings—as nearly as though my hand had been always clasped in his.'

She was not indignant, as she had been when her companion had reflected upon Raymond's motives, but her tones had a certain tender dignity which was very impressive. On Mr. Pearson, however, this did not seem to have much effect.

'He was a good father to you, then, though he was so much from home?' said he quietly.

'The best of fathers; his poverty compelled him to live abroad with his regiment.'

'Umph! I thought regiments came home every five or six years or so.'

'He exchanged more than once for the reasons I have stated.'

'He was a good husband, then, no doubt?'

'I do not feel called upon, Mr. Pearson, to discuss with you the affairs of my family,' said Nelly coldly. 'As a matter of fact, however, there was a misunderstanding between my dear father and mother. They are both in Heaven now, and that is over.' She rose and went to the window to hide her tears.

'Pray forgive me if I have pained you, my dear young lady. Such misunderstandings are common enough, and, as you say, death heals all.'

He sighed so deeply that Nelly turned to him with pity in her dewy eyes. She could not help thinking how near he looked to death himself.

'You have given me more than full measure,' said she, alluding to the two hours' teaching that had been agreed upon as the length of her lessons; 'you must not lavish on me thus your time and strength.' The last word was uttered involuntarily, and was suggested by his appearance.

'But then we have been so discursive,' answered he with a faint smile.

'And, Mr. Pearson,' continued Nelly, blushing, and speaking so that Janet could not hear her, 'when would it be most convenient to you to—I mean, shall I send you what is due to you—and very small remuneration it is for such kindly teaching—weekly, or——'

The fact was, her tutor looked so poor, as well as ill, that she

thought he might even prefer to receive his money day by day—a reflection which alone enabled her to summon courage to speak upon such a subject.

'Oh, I think monthly will do,' interrupted he, still smiling. 'You may imagine, perhaps, to look at me that I may not live a month, but that is my affair.'

'Dear Mr. Pearson, how you shock me!'

'Do I? then I won't do it again. Seriously, I am not going to die just yet, having something of importance to do first. Well, here are the heads for you to study in my absence'—he had brought a couple of chalk drawings with him—'only, don't you overwork yourself. It is better to read than to draw, remember, if you want to avoid thinking too much; and you'll write to say you'll have that pension, won't you?' added he suddenly.

'I will turn the matter over in my mind,' answered Nelly gravely, 'though the pension is not the point.'

'No, indeed; I forgot. It is your father's memory. You are a good girl; you will do what is right. Good day to you, my dear young lady.'

Despite his ghastly looks, Nelly thought she had seldom seen a kindlier smile than that of Mr. Pearson. His troubles might have embittered his nature, but surely it was still wholesome and tender at the core.

CHAPTER XX.

HAUNTED.

It is a fortnight since Nelly Conway took her first lesson in Gower Street, and during that time there have been spring tides in the ebb and flow of the lives of more than one person in this history, and she has been the moon which has most certainly caused them. Herbert Milburn has let his 'family seat,' to his sister's extreme annoyance, and sailed for China, though his leave has by no means expired. It seems to him that he will never wish to return to his native land again.

Ralph Pennicuick is sitting at his chamber window at the Albany, watching the waning light in the skies, and the growing light in the streets. There is something which lies before him to be done this night which lies heavy on his soul, and prevents his giving his mind to any other subject for an instant. On the notice board of the House of Commons there is a statement that he, Ralph Pennicuick, will rise in his place, within the next four hours, and put a question to the Government concerning certain proceedings at Dhulang, and as to the reasons why a pension should not have been conferred upon the orphan daughter of Captain Arthur Conway deceased. The chief Tory organ has expressed its approval of this course in a far from complimentary fashion.

Among its 'Topics of the Day' appeared this paragraph :—'We are glad to inform our readers that we are at last to hear from the honourable member for Slowcombe his own story of the Dhulang catastrophe; we shall compare it very carefully with certain notes of the same event with which we have been specially favoured by an eye-witness.' The appearance of these few lines, which were probably passed by altogether unnoticed by nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of those who read them, had affected the subject of them most seriously. Indeed, since his eyes had lit on them they had not known sleep. An eye-witness! That must certainly be a falsehood, for, except Fu-chow and the Chinese officials, there could be no witness to what had happened at Dhulang in existence. Still, how came such a paragraph into the paper? It had come out within twelve hours of his placing his notice on the board, and bitterly he now repented of having done so. It had been weak of him to the last degree to make his consent dependent upon Nelly's wishes, but he made certain that she would have opposed such a proceeding. How useless were sagacity and knowledge of human character to forecast the whims of women!

The reflection may have been a just one, but intelligent as Pennicuick undoubtedly was, he had not possessed the *data* for judgment in the present case. His mind had only concerned itself with the matter of the pension, which, we have seen, was not Nelly's motive of action at all: had that been the only question involved, she would no doubt have declined his services, and justified his foresight. But since she had said, 'Yes,' he, Ralph Pennicuick (though he had prided himself all his life upon that very capability) had not had the moral courage to say 'No.' So weak

and broken was he, that, so far from taking any pleasure in setting opinion at defiance, he bowed to it; the thought of what Mr. Wardlaw, and Herbert Milburn, and even his own son would 'say' should he go back from his word, and refuse to become Nelly's champion, had been too much for him. He had given the desired notice, and now he would have paid down half he was worth in the world—double the 20,000*l.*, to secure which by fraud had cost him so dearly—to be able to withdraw it. But this required even something more than courage—audacity. Should he now shrink from the ordeal, judgment would go against him, as it were, by default, and even his own party would not have a word to say for him.

Of course he exaggerated, as every man does, the amount of public attention he excited, but still this was very considerable. From the day of his election, now many months ago, up to now, the Tory papers—especially the chief organ of the opposition—had never, as the phrase goes, 'let him alone.' But this last paragraph about the Eye-witness had hit him harder than anything which had preceded it. He had consulted about it with his son—for the burden of the whole matter had become almost more than he could bear alone, and what he *could* talk about, he discussed with him eagerly—and Raymond expressed himself more convinced than ever, that the attack was not dictated by mere party motives. 'You have some enemy, father, who has done this,' said he, 'and who has been working against you all along, like a mole, underground.'

'If he is a mole, he can't be an eye-witness,' said Ralph, with a gleam of his old grim humour.

'Of course not; it is mere lying. The Newspaper has two strongholds: the Impersonal, who is nobody but itself, the We;

and the Personal, who is nobody at all. It is folly to contend with either of them, being shadows.'

The remark would seem to evidence that the young man had begun to think for himself, and, curiously enough, this had a disagreeable effect upon his father.

'I am failing and he is growing,' thought he; 'he is pushing me from my throne, and will presently reign in my stead.'

But, on the other hand, Raymond had by this time a good many acquaintances on the Press, from whom it was likely enough he might have picked up this philosophy. Without revealing his intention, he went away and consulted some of these respecting the paragraph in question, and gleaned some important information. Then he came back and told his father.

'My suspicions have proved correct,' he said; 'those attacks have been all personal; they have been "communicated."'

'And the person?'

'Well, that I have not been able to discover. I doubt whether the newspaper itself knows who it is. What is very curious is that the substance of the last paragraph was brought to the office by a Chinese.'

Ralph Pennicuick started from his chair with a fierce oath 'It is Fu-chow,' he cried.

'Who is Fu-chow?'

'A traitorous scoundrel in my employment on our shooting expedition, who discovered that the Shay-le—the relic—had been abstracted from the shrine, and gave information to the authorities. It was he, in fact, who ruined us.'

'Forewarned is forearmed, sir,' said Raymond gravely; 'that circumstance should certainly be mentioned in your speech to-night.'

It was upon that speech, to be delivered in a few hours, that Ralph Pennicuick was now pondering alone. His difficulties in the matter were enormous, and wholly exceptional. A maiden speech upon any subject in the House of Commons is an embarrassing undertaking to most people; but the usual stumbling-blocks did not trouble him. He had no *mauvaise honte*; he had plenty of words at his command; and no one expected either a lengthy or a powerful oration. He had merely to make a statement of facts, every one of which was at his fingers' ends. But, unhappily, though authentic, these were the reverse of genuine They had happened, but they had happened to himself, and he must needs describe them as having happened to another man. What he had to tell, in fact, was a Lie from beginning to end; and this is rather a feat to do successfully in the House of Commons, with the consciousness, too, that half-a-dozen hostile newspapers will be endeavouring to detect your falsehood the next morning.

It seemed inconceivable that Fu-chow could have come to London, and put himself in connection with the Press: but how could Raymond's story about the Chinese informant be otherwise explained? Fu-chow had shown hostility enough against him for anything (Mr. Pennicuick stigmatised it in his own mind as 'malice,' though we know it had been but the payment of old scores), but it could never have been worth his while to come to England to wreak it. The only possible solution of the thing, though even that was improbable, was that some Englishman had brought Fu-chow home in his service, and that, finding himself in a position to do his old enemy a mischief, he was taking advantage of his opportunity.

He resolved at all events to take his son's advice, and to present the Imperial Parliament with a very dark picture of 'Captain' Fu-chow. At the same time, such was the state of his nerves, that he was not convinced by his own arguments, and feared lest even his worst apprehensions should, somehow, fall short of the reality. The condition of the whole man was one by no means unknown to the medical world, but which goes under a number of scientific names—names which often conceal its real nature. I have known a man unjustly suspected of delirium tremens, who was in reality troubled by the consciousness of having murdered a child of tender years. Ralph Pennicuick was conscience-smitten. Wrongdoers sometimes are so; they are morally prostrated by the guilty knowledge within them; and yet they generally retain their intelligence—as some would call their reluctance to part with their stolen goods.

Nothing, for example, was further from Ralph Pennicuick's mind that night than the idea of restitution, which had in fact by this time become almost impossible for him. It was doubtful whether, even if he should have gone down to the House and spoken the whole truth exactly respecting what had occurred at Dhulang, he would have been believed. Most people would have thought he had lost his wits; his own son would certainly have done so, and would have preferred to think his father mad, rather than guilty of the crime of which he had thus accused himself. Ralph Pennicuick felt like a man lost in some primeval forest, who plods on with weary and uncertain steps, suspicious of unknown dangers, with this terrible addition to his lot, that the way he had come was barred behind him.

The wind blowing boisterously from the south, brought pre-

sently to his ears the voice of the great clock at Westminster; and he rang his bell for the servant to bring his overcoat.

'This has just come for you, sir, by the post,' said Hatton, putting a roll of manuscript, as it seemed, into his hand.

'Why do you pester me with such rubbish now?' answered his master pettishly.

'Well, sir, it had "immediate" on it, or I should not have brought it in.'

'You may go,' said Mr. Pennicuick, who was now equipped for departure: the vague terror with which he was consumed impelled him, however, ere he went, to open this communication in private, though it was ten chances to one it was but some circular, the 'immediate' on which was but a device to secure attention.

The manuscript was tightly rolled, and had something hard inside it, which presently fell out upon the floor; it was only a round piece of wood such as drawings are wrapped round to go by post. The drawing itself was in Mr. Pennicuick's hand, and his eyes were fixed upon it in abject terror. It was the representation of a man tied to a stake, and being cut to pieces by an executioner in Chinese apparel: a vast crowd of men of the same nation were looking on, but indicated only by a few bold strokes: the whole picture was but a sketch, very slightly but skilfully rendered, with one exception—namely, the countenance of the victim. This was most carefully and elaborately drawn, and represented without a shadow of doubt—indeed, almost as truly as the mirror reflects its object—the very face which was now regarding it, namely, that of Pennicuick himself. Underneath, at the left-hand corner, was written, but in printed characters,

the day of the month on which Arthur Conway had been put to death at Dhulang.

For a minute or two, it seemed as though Ralph Pennicuick were on the eve of some physical calamity; he stood swaying from side to side, as if about to fall, while his face worked in a manner frightful to behold: but presently he steadied himself, and tore the picture along and across and threw it on the fire, then the wrapper (addressed, like the date within, in printed characters), and afterwards even the little roll of wood. (If conscience were combustible, as some theologians assert the soul to be, how easy it would be to deal with it!) Then he drew out that drawer in his table which we have seen him open before—it glided out very easily now, as though it well knew its way—and took a deep draught of brandy.

'Your brougham is at the door, sir,' said Hatton, putting in his respectable head.

'Send it away: I'll walk,' was the abrupt reply.

Mr. Hatton withdrew, shaking his head and compressing his nose with a wry face; he was a man who never took spirits himself—preferring the claret of '64—and hated the smell of them.

Presently his master hurried out, and ran rapidly downstairs and into the street. The wind was in his teeth, but he did not mind that; physical exertion was welcome to him. Under the flickering gas lamps, with one hand on his hat and the other pressed to his breast, he walked rapidly down Waterloo Place, intending as usual when on foot to go through St. James's Park to Westminster. Something, however—perhaps the comparative gloom of that route—deterred him, and he turned sharply towards Parliament Street. Twice, blinded by the wind, and also by the

tumult of his own thoughts, which rendered him scarcely cognisant of external objects, he came into collision with other passengers on the footway; and when at last he reached Westminster Hall and was about to enter it, he came face to face with a third man. No actual contact this time took place, yet Ralph Pennicuick started back with a sharp and sudden cry; and with a quick toss of the arms (as though one should say 'All's Lost!') he fell heavily on the pavement.

A crowd was round him in a moment: his face was known, as is that of every member of the House at Westminster, after he has once taken his seat (though it has been but for an hour), and he was placed in a brougham at once, and taken home, speechless and insensible.

Dr. Green was summoned at once, and of course Raymond. There were also two other doctors promptly in attendance. The medical opinion was that Mr. Pennicuick had had a stroke of apoplexy, though there were some symptoms not in accordance with this view. A little after midnight he recovered his speech.

'I have seen him,' he said suddenly, in distinct tones.

'Who is it you have seen, father?' asked Raymond gently, as he leant over his pillow.

'*Arthur Conway.*'

CHAPTER XXI.

A GOOD SON.

MATTERS were so serious with Ralph Pennicuick that night, that Raymond occupied a bedroom at his father's chambers, but he accompanied Dr. Green on his way home to have a few minutes' private talk with him: a doctor being always reticent, but in the presence of other doctors absolutely dumb.

'It is a very bad case, I fear, Dr. Green,' said Raymond with grave abruptness.

'It is a complicated and serious one,' was the reply.

'How can you possibly account for such an extraordinary hallucination as that which my poor father labours under?'

'It is not at all extraordinary, my dear young sir, if you use the word in the sense of uncommon; I have seen a hundred such cases. You observed, I dare say, that I did not attempt to reason with the patient: nor even make any remark with respect to the absurdity of his conviction. The fact is, I did not wish my professional brethren to know that the person he was speaking of was dead.

'Why?'

'Well, I consider myself a friend of the family, and though of course these things are supposed among us to go no farther, it

is always best to be on the safe side. Your father may recover, you see——'

'Indeed I hope so,' put in the young man quickly.

'Just so: then it is better to keep things quiet. It is said by a great philosopher—but who did not have the advantage of being a student of medicine—that where a man takes his ideas for facts, and what he imagines for things, that man is mad. But this is not always the case. The hallucination sometimes arises from a less hopeless but still a very serious cause. I am about to ask you a painful question, but it is necessary you should be frank with me. Does your father take much wine at dinner?'

'No. He has always been a singularly abstemious man in that respect. I have heard him say, and have no doubt of the fact, that he can take any amount of wine without it affecting him, but he never had any taste that way. I have seen him rise from table directly after dinner when other men sat over their claret, because drinking was disagreeable to him.'

'And there has been no change in him in that respect of late months—since his return from China, for example?'

'None that I am aware of.'

'My dear young friend, you have corroborated my worst suspicions. Your father takes stimulants in secret, and to a great extent.'

'You astonish me, doctor.'

'Nevertheless I am speaking truth. There are certain indications in him which convince me of it. Moreover, when I asked for brandy, Hatton took some out of the little drawer, and I had noticed before that there was a smell of raw cognac in the sitting-room; and it was not for the first time.'

'Good heavens!' cried Raymond painfully; 'that explains everything.'

'No, it does not; only some things. Your father has a fixed idea: ideas are always dangerous when a man has not to gain his own living by them; this one has become morbid and monopolising.'

'You refer to this Dhulang affair, of course?'

'Yes. Those two scientific gentlemen had not heard about it, I saw; they are "devoted to their profession," as the phrase is; that is to say, they throw away all advantages external to it, and flatter themselves that gives them "a pull"—which it does, only in the wrong direction. They had never heard of Arthur Conway, though the whole town is ringing with his name. You must on no account permit your father to read a newspaper for the next ten days.'

'I am afraid it is not likely that he will feel equal to do so,' said Raymond gloomily.

'It is the first thing he will ask for—to see the papers,' said the doctor confidently.

And Dr. Green was right. Twice and thrice the doctor called next morning, but always to find his patient in heavy stertorous slumber. Late in the day, however, he awoke, and turning his eyes upon his son, who was sitting by his pillow, put out his hand. Raymond, surprised and pleased by this touch of feeling, seized and pressed it eagerly: but he had mistaken the meaning of the action.

'Where are they?' said the sick man hoarsely. 'Why have you not brought the papers as usual? Open the curtains—give me light.'

When the light poured in, he saw that it was not Hatton who was watching by him, but his own son.

'You are a good lad, Raymond,' he sighed; 'a good lad.'

It would not have been a very tender speech for most fathers under the like circumstances, but coming from the mouth of Ralph Pennicuick, it went straight to his son's heart.

'I hope—I trust, dear father, that you feel better.'

'You wish me to live, then?

'Good heavens! How can you ask me such a question? There is nothing that I so earnestly desire.'

'How strange!' murmured the sick man; then added, with what was less like a smile than a sharp spasm of the lips, 'and how unwise!'

Raymond, deeply pained, answered nothing. He knew, of course, what his father meant: that if he died, he (Raymond) would be his own master, and might claim perhaps the dearest wish of his heart, or what had seemed so up to that moment. To do him justice, the spectacle of his father's condition had made him, for the time, oblivious to all else.

Then again the sick man said, 'Give me the morning papers.' Raymond had read already all that they had to say upon the subject which he knew was engrossing his father's thought; and the doctor's veto was fresh in his mind.

'Indeed, father, it would not be good for you.'

'There is a Bible of your mother's somewhere, Raymond; in the second drawer yonder. Bring it to me.'

Raymond brought it; it was wrapped up in paper, and had not been touched for the last twenty years; he gave it open into his father's hand.

'I thought so,' muttered the sick man peevishly. 'I cannot read it; the letters run together; I am blind.'

'Not blind, sir, but only weak. Let me read it to you.'

'The Bible! No. Read me the papers—all that is said about what happened last night.'

'Indeed, sir, it will do you harm.'

'Be so good as to do as I tell you, or I will get Hatton to read them. Perhaps that will be better.'

'No, sir; if you insist upon it, I had rather read them myself.'

'Ah, they are very bitter, then. Not that I mind Hatton. He knows much worse of me than you do, my poor lad.'

Raymond could not gainsay that: he bowed his head, and fetched two newspapers from the next room. He chose the Government organ first; it described the sudden 'seizure,' as it termed it, to which Mr. Ralph Pennicuick had succumbed, just as he was entering the House of Commons the previous night; 'it was only too much to be feared,' it said, 'that this had been brought on by excitement caused by certain infamous calumnies lately published by a contemporary in relation to his conduct at Dhulang, and which it had been his intention to refute that very evening.'

'Very good,' said Ralph, with the same ghastly shiver of a smile. 'That is all in the way of friendship. The *bonne bouche* is still to come. What does the enemy say?'

'It says what is most offensive and abominable,' answered Raymond. 'I do most earnestly beg of you to treat it with the contempt it merits. It can only give you unnecessary pain and——'

'Read, read,' murmured the sick man impatiently. Raymond, with a movement of his shoulders expressive of disgust at his task, reluctantly obeyed.

'"Last night, as it will be remembered, was the time appointed

for the Hon. Member for Slowcombe to make his explanation regarding the mysterious affair at Dhulang, under cover of a question to the Government with respect to the payment of a pension to the orphan daughter of the late Captain Conway. His statement was looked forward to by the public with peculiar interest in consequence of certain circumstances to which we have from time to time called the attention of our readers: and their curiosity, it seems, is, after all, not likely to be quickly satisfied. Mr. Ralph Pennicuick, it is said, was seized with sudden illness on the very threshold of the House of Commons. From certain information which has reached us, and which we hold in our hands, this incident seems to us, to say the least of it, to the last degree unfortunate for the Hon. Member for Slowcombe. If he is innocent of certain grave matters which we refrain for the present from alluding to more particularly, never was an attack of illness more inopportune; if, on the other hand, he is guilty—and supposing the hon. gentleman's indisposition to be physical, and as serious as it is represented—one would almost imagine——"'

'Well, what?' inquired the sick man impatiently. 'Why can't the hack speak out?'

'He does speak out, sir,' said Raymond hesitatingly, 'and in the next sentence: but I hardly like to repeat such words: "one would imagine," he says, "that the Finger of Providence had intervened in the matter, and struck the guilty down."' Raymond expected an outburst of wrath, or more probably some expression of scorn. But there was only silence, and this alarmed him. His father had closed his eyes.

'I am sure, sir, you are too sensible, even in your present weak condition,' said Raymond, 'to be moved by vulgar declamation of

this sort. If I am not much mistaken, such words are actionable, though indeed the horsewhip applied to such a scoundrel——'

'Draw down the blind, Raymond; the light hurts me,' interrupted his father, as though he heard him not.

Then there was silence again, which to the young man, unused to illness, and dreading he knew not what, was almost intolerable.

'Will you not have a cup of tea, sir?' said he presently. The sick man's lips moved slowly, and the young man leant down to listen.

'"And struck the guilty down,"' were the words he heard; and again: '"the finger of Providence"—that means the finger of God.'

It was positively astounding to Raymond to hear the invective of a penny paper repeated thus with every sign of intense feeling by his father's lips. Of course, it showed how weak and ill he was; but still it was astounding.

'Providence is stronger than we are, after all, my lad,' continued the other, in more distinct tones. 'I have fought against it all my life. But I give in.'

'It is never too late to make our peace with God,' said Raymond reverently.

'I would I could make my peace with Man,' was the unexpected reply.

'Oh father, if there is anything on your mind that troubles it—as I have for some time feared,' said Raymond earnestly—'I beseech you, if it would lighten your load, to let me share the burden.'

'Ah, you think I am dying,' answered the other bitterly; 'you would have me confess, would you? Why don't you send Hatton for a priest? It would be a strange errand, but he would do your bidding. He has been educated to be astonished at nothing.'

'Indeed, sir, I trust you are not dying——'

'Then you trust in vain: I *am*,' interrupted the sick man curtly. 'When I pass through that door again, it will be feet foremost.'

'If it be so, father,' said Raymond solemnly, 'I entreat you more than ever to ease your mind of this sore trouble. Tell me—your only son—what it is, that I may comfort you.'

'You do not know what you ask, lad,' sighed the sick man wearily; he turned his face to the wall as though to avoid further questioning, but not before Raymond had marked a certain yearning look in his eyes which seemed to contradict the action.

'I do not know, of course, father, nor do I wish to know except for your sake; but if I could give you ever so little comfort——'

'It would cost you dearly,' put in the other gravely.

'If you mean that it would lose me money, sir, I beseech you not to let that weigh with you. What is money compared with peace of mind?'

'Nay, what is *your* money compared with *my* peace of mind—that is the question,' said the sick man bitterly. It was curious to see how his old self asserted itself in the intervals, as it were, of his new condition of mind.

'Well, sir, I answer, Nothing.'

'Twenty thousand pounds is not to be called nothing, lad. That is what you would have to pay for hearing my story. No publisher has ever given such a sum yet for a three-volume one.'

This speech, instead of being given trippingly on the tip of the tongue, was delivered in a hoarse voice, with stops and gasps; the dew stood on the speaker's brow, his dilated eyes were fixed upon the pattern of the paper on the wall.

'I would give twice the sum, father, if I possessed it,' said Raymond simply, 'to see you at ease in mind or body.'

'That will never be, lad: yet I could wish——'

'What, what, father? There is nothing I would not do, nothing I would not sacrifice, to give you comfort.'

'I know it, I feel it: you are a good son—I had forgotten something. No, no. It would be a poor return indeed for such loving duty. The money, as you say, would be nothing in your eyes, though it has been much—too much—in mine. It is lying heavy on me now, and will press me down, down in the very grave.'

'Oh sir, I beseech you tell me, if this burden may be lifted, ever so little——'

'No, lad, no; it would be your ruin. I do not mean the mere money loss; but it would destroy your happiness. There are things in the Bible true after all: that the sins of the father are visited on the children, for one thing. You don't understand, my lad. How should you?'

'I know at least, sir, that I am your son,' said Raymond firmly; 'and it is mine by right to share my father's burden.'

'Your right would be a wrong, Raymond,' answered the sick man, turning his face towards his son with a pitiful look; 'a grievous and cruel wrong. If I told you what is on my mind, the dearest wish of your heart would be blighted for ever. You could never marry Ellen Conway.'

Raymond turned white to the very lips. His heart became as lead. He felt that the lamp that lives within us all, when fed by Love and Youth (though it may burn but low), was suddenly extinguished, leaving all things dark; but he answered in a firm voice, nevertheless, 'Tell me, father.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SELF-ACCUSER.

'Do you remember a play of Shakespeare's, Raymond, where a man says to his sister, "Death is a dreadful thing," and she replies, "And shamed life a hateful"?'

'Yes, father.'

'Well, I was once in that man's position. I saw before me—immediately before me—a slow and painful death, and also a way of escape by the sacrifice of another man. And I chose the way of escape. To be sure, I did so with the consent of the other.'

'That was something,' said Raymond, drawing a deep breath.

'Well, it was short of murder. I said to myself this: "I am rich, this man is poor: I enjoy life, and he has not the means to do so. It is better, therefore, if one of us is to die, that it should be he and not I."'

'It was not certain, then, that the man would die?'

'It was quite certain, though we pretended to one another—or at least I pretended to him—that there was a chance of rescue, of ransom. What I tried to persuade myself he did, was to risk his life for mine: but what I knew in my heart he did, was to sacrifice it for mine; and he did sacrifice it.'

'Oh father, was it Arthur Conway?'

'Yes, Raymond: it was my friend: I may say, indeed (for I did not know you for what you are at that time), my only friend. I took advantage of his poverty to persuade him to part with his existence.'

The cloud of distress and shame that had settled upon Raymond's brow since his father had begun to speak here lifted a little; his face, though it still wore a look of intense pity, began to clear.

'Do not deceive yourself, my lad,' said the sick man, who was regarding him attentively; 'I have not lost my wits, nor, alas! even my memory. What seems incredible to you, seemed to me a very natural course to take at the time, I do assure you. Circumstance is a very powerful agent in the affairs of this world, not even second to Opportunity.'

'But if Captain Conway took away the Relic from the Temple——'

'He did *not*,' interrupted Ralph Pennicuick quietly. '*I* took it.'

'You?'

Raymond involuntarily drew back a pace from his father's pillow. His face expressed repugnance as well as horror.

'You are not fit to be a priest, lad,' observed the other coldly; 'a priest ought to be shocked at nothing. And besides, I am not asking for absolution. That is an easy thing to give compared with what I am about to demand of you.'

'My all is at your service, sir,' said Raymond in slow mechanical tones. 'What can I do for you?'

'You can make restitution.'

'I cannot give back his life to Arthur Conway.'

'That is true. But you must understand that it was a bargain.

He took my guilt upon him, knowingly, and for a consideration. You would not make things worse for me than they are, lad, if you knew what was coming.'

What was coming! What *could* he be about to hear worse than he had already heard? His father had confessed himself guilty of all, and more, that had been vaguely laid to his charge. He had committed the crime for which another had suffered, and for which he had permitted him to suffer. How that had happened was in comparison but a small thing; it *had* happened.

'I was in gaol, Raymond: I had been tortured,' continued the sick man piteously; 'and life was so dear to me.'

'Then you were not yourself, sir,' cried the young man eagerly: 'you were weak and shattered; if you had had time to think——'

'I had plenty of time,' put in the other irritably: 'I had nothing else to do but to think, or to think of but myself. I must make a clean breast of it, lad, or tell nothing. No one shall ever accuse Ralph Pennicuick of cant—but only of Robbery and Murder.'

It was frightful to mark the smile with which he spoke, the very blossom, as it seemed, of self-contempt and cynicism: like the scorpion that turns its sting against itself when hedged in by the ring of fire, so had it happened to his bitter spirit.

'Robbery and murder!' repeated Raymond mechanically. He could no longer believe his father mad, and could hardly refuse credit to any statement he should make to his own disadvantage. These were crimes, as he thought, of which he had not as yet accused himself, and they astounded him.

'To be sure, you have not heard all,' said the sick man, perceiving his look of amazement. 'However, when a man steals a relic, and, being condemned to death for it, permits his friend to die for him—and to bear the disgrace as well, mark you—that is what the world would call by two ugly names. Moreover, that I murdered Arthur Conway is certain, or his ghost would not haunt me.'

'Well, *that* cannot be, father,' said Raymond emphatically; 'you may imagine as much from a morbid sense of your own wrong-doing; but as to a ghost in these days——'

'Stop!' cried the other vehemently; and then, exhausted by his own exertion, he was silent for a moment, while his son stood dumb before him. 'There are some things, Raymond, I never liked—such as contradiction. And in this case I won't stand it. I may be mad—I begin to think I am—to have told you what I have, but I will not be held in other respects to be a madman. I saw Arthur Conway last night, as plainly and as near me as I see you now. He looked old, and wan, and white, but it was he and no other. It is as true as—well, I don't believe in many things—let us say as that I am now upon my death-bed. I was stepping into Westminster Hall, and he was the first man to meet me. He looked, as to the expression of his face, exactly as I should have expected him to look; he said—that is, his eyes said—"You are a liar, a robber, and a murderer." It was too much for me—being guilty of those crimes—and as that paper said, it struck me down.'

'If you saw him, father, he is not dead. Did you see him at Dhulang after death?'

'Yes. I saw his naked body pierced with ten thousand

wounds tied to the post where they had hacked him to death. Milburn and one other man saw him also. You are thinking, "This is a delusion; and if a man deludes himself in one thing, he may do so in another." Dismiss that fond hope from your mind, lad. I am as sane as you are, and have told you the simple truth—unhappily, not all of it. Give me some brandy.'

'I entreat you to excite yourself no more at present, sir,' said Raymond, with whom pity had once more regained its ascendency. 'You have taken nothing to strengthen you for many hours. Let me get you a cup of coffee—something for breakfast——'

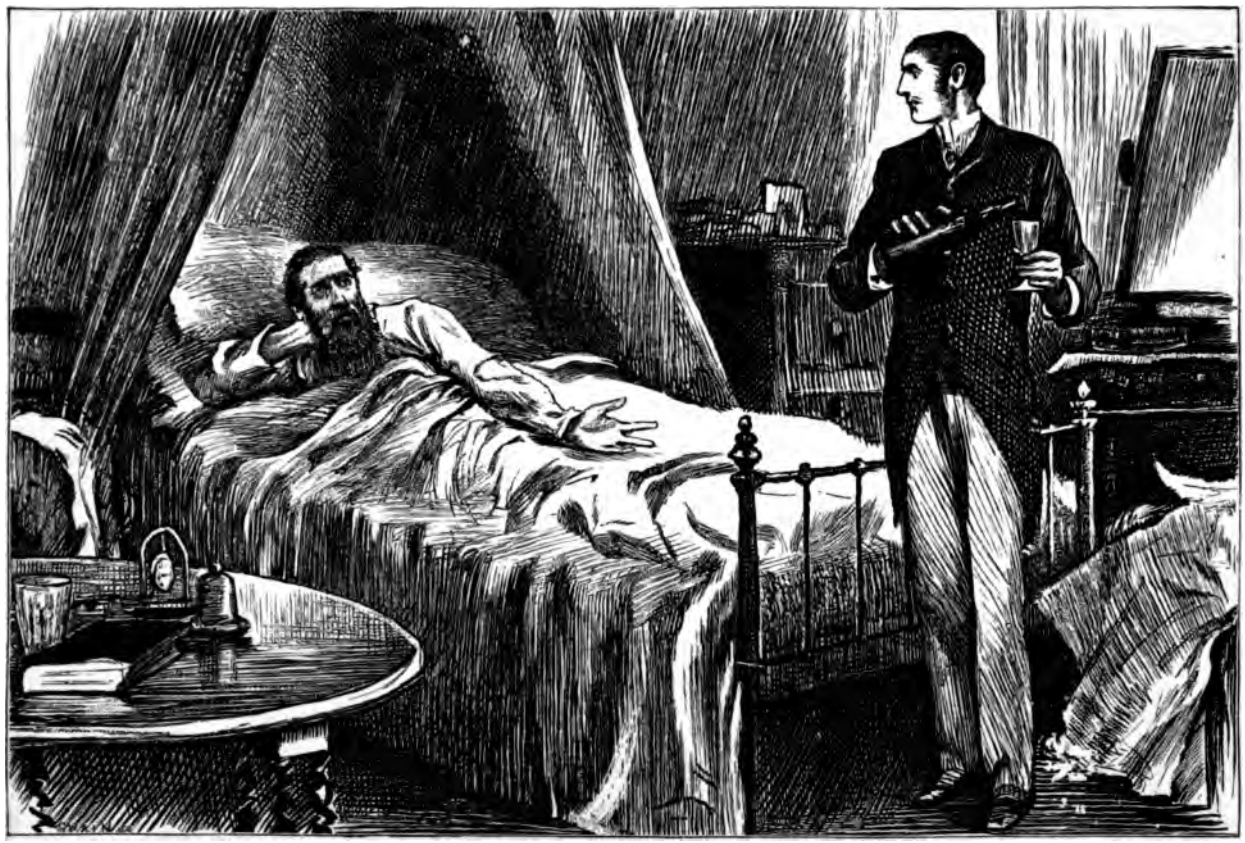
'I am long past the coffee stage, lad,' murmured the sick man, whose powers of speech seemed to have almost ebbed away; 'I must have what my stomach is accustomed to. You will find the bottle in the wardrobe.'

'At least, sir, spare yourself for the present,' sighed Raymond, as he reluctantly produced the liquor. 'When you have had what you wish, try to sleep a little.'

'No, my lad. When one has to have a limb cut off, it is done at a single operation. I have begun, and I must go through with it. Moreover, there is no "for the present" for me, I am very sure. To-morrow—nay, an hour else—may be too late. Thanks! that is life, or all that I shall know of it, till it is over.'

He lay back, with closed eyes, and was so long silent that Raymond began to hope that he had involuntarily given way to slumber; but he was in fact only rallying his feeble powers.

'You have never asked me,' he recommenced, 'what it was that induced Arthur Conway to die so many deaths instead of me. It was his poverty. He wished to place his wife and child—that Nelly, my poor boy, who can never now be yours—above the reach



'At least, sir, spare yourself for the present.'

of want—nay, in affluence. "If I lose my life for yours"—he said, for *he* said 'lose,' though *I* said 'risk'—"you must pay me 20,000*l*." It seemed but a small sum to me, as I lay on the floor of my wretched prison, the door of which would only open to me to be led forth to death and torture, but afterwards it seemed greater.'

Raymond groaned.

'Yes, you have guessed it. I robbed him. I bought his life and never paid the purchase-money. When one has committed murder, robbery comes quite easy—no, not easy, or I should not be lying here.'

'For Heaven's sake, sir, let this money be paid to the poor girl at once; that is the first thing to be done.'

'No. You must wait till the breath is out of my body; that is the first thing I must do—to die. I have told you what a false and wretched creature lies before you, because you call him "father," but I cannot confess it to all the world. The girl can wait an hour or two, a day at furthest, since she has waited so many months already. I killed her mother too, for her husband's death, for which I am answerable, was the cause of hers. Let me leave the world without her daughter's curse.—Raymond, can you forgive me?'

'Oh sir, it is not I who have anything to forgive,' cried the young man, bursting into tears; 'it is our Father which is in Heaven.'

'I am not speaking to a priest, but to my son,' returned the sick man curtly. 'Do you not see that it is you whom I am wronging now, my own flesh and blood, as I have wronged these others before? It was a selfish act, like all the rest, to have told

you what I have. Why did you urge me to do it in spite of my solemn warning?'

'I do not regret it, father. Restitution can at least be made.'

'Yes, but not to you. I cannot restore to you the happiness which my words have taken away. You love this girl, but how can you ever be her husband, when you know that her father's death lies at my door, and that I robbed him afterwards?'

'I saw from the first, sir,' answered Raymond gently, 'that what you were about to say would kill my hopes.'

'Then you have borne with me like a man, lad. Can you still take my hand, knowing what I am, and say, "Farewell, father"?'

Raymond took the fevered fingers which the other extended towards him, in his own; then, bending down, kissed the cheek his lips had never touched since he was a little child.

'Hush, my lad,' for Raymond was weeping bitterly: 'I hear the Doctor's voice; he must not be bilked of his last fee. You will find Tatham has all your affairs at his fingers' ends; the twenty thousand pounds, that I had not the heart to part with, can be realised at once. Hatton has served me well, after his fashion. Stop! keep Green out till you have put away the brandy. Men will say hard things of Ralph Pennicuick when he's grassed over—those that were most civil to him when he was above ground, the hardest, because they feared him—but do not let them say "he drank."'

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DILEMMA.

For some weeks Nelly had gone on with her studies under Mr. Pearson's superintendence, but a day or two had now passed without his making his appearance. This intermission in his visits had been by no means unexpected. She had felt sure that his failing health must needs break down sooner or later; and it had broken down rather more suddenly than she had looked for. That indisposition was the reason of his absence she had discovered by sending to his lodgings; for he had written no line about himself. He had said at Sandybeach that he could not write, that he was prevented (as he would have it appear) by some physical cause from so doing; but she was inclined to set this down to a mere eccentric disinclination. This poor man was full of eccentricities, which Nelly regarded not only with indulgence, but with favour—a sure sign that she had conceived a genuine liking for her tutor; for it is only where there is real affection that these excrescences on the character are patiently endured. He had earned her good opinion not only by his kind and gentle ways and excellent tutorship, but by the generous sympathies of his nature, which a bitter experience (as she judged his to be) of life had been unable to destroy. Of his regard for herself there could be no doubt. When, as we have

seen, she had asked his advice, it was given not only sagaciously, but with a consideration for the whole of the circumstances of the case that evinced a strong personal interest. He did not, as too many physicians do, prescribe 'a cob' when his patient was too poor to keep one, or 'Carlsbad' when he must needs make his daily bread in England. As to that particular opinion of his concerning the bringing her father's case before Parliament, no practical judgment could be passed on it as to whether it had been wrong or right, for it had never been put in practice. Mr. Ralph Pennicuick, indeed, had, in a few civil lines expressed his intention to carry out Nelly's wishes, but had been prevented from doing so at the last moment by an illness which had since proved fatal to him. It had also been a source of grievous sorrow to Nelly herself, for, though she had small liking for the man, was he not Raymond's father? She knew that the lad's loyal heart would feel this loss, and the more so because it had happened under very distressing circumstances: for even to her secluded home had come the echoes of the gossip that imputed to the dead M.P. certain vague charges of misconduct at Dhulang, and hinted at things much more shameful.

This would have been bad enough, but in addition there was the pain of knowing that in this matter Raymond and herself had been placed, through their respective fathers, in somewhat antagonistic positions. Indeed (though of this she was happily ignorant), one of the newspapers had actually spoken of their interests as being opposed to one another, and even drawn a picture of Raymond lolling in the lap of luxury, while the daughter of his father's friend and victim was steeped to the lips in poverty. No communication had passed between them since Raymond had written to urge her

to adopt the very course which had, as it happened, helped to bring down this storm of calumny upon his father and his father's memory. She had received the news of Mr. Pennicuick's death only a day or two ago, and was still doubtful whether or no she should write to Raymond to condole with him, when a communication arrived for her that put her judgment to a severer test, and made the advice of some mentor almost indispensable.

It was a communication of a business nature that might have puzzled folks more familiar with affairs than she, but would have been received by most people with far too much pleasure to admit of question. It was simply an intimation from her bankers that a sum of money, amounting to no less a sum than nearly 21,000*l.*, had been anonymously paid in to her account, thereby increasing the same more than a hundredfold. About 200*l.* had heretofore represented her available capital, and now she had become an heiress. She had repaired to the bank at once, but had been unable to glean any further information save the assurance that the money was there; the manager could not, or would not, enlighten her; he said that the sum in question had been paid in in notes by an unknown person, and that the bank had had no right to refuse to receive them. He evidently thought her a very fortunate young lady, but somewhat foolish withal, to make any stir about a matter the result of which had been so eminently satisfactory for her.

Generally speaking, we may say that if anybody were to pay 21,000*l.* into one's banker's account—which is a proceeding by no means so familiar as it would be welcome—one would know who it was, even if the donor did his best to remain anonymous. Even if one's acquaintance lay among very rich people, there could be

little difficulty in pitching upon the person who had shown so proper a sense of one's merits; while 'if one knew only one or two, the identification would lie within correspondingly narrower limits.

To Nelly the problem was easy, since there were only two persons of her acquaintance who were capable of such an action—not in the sense of nobility of mind, but of possession of capital. Mr. Wardlaw and Raymond Pennicuick (and he only within the last forty-eight hours), of all whom Nelly knew, alone had it in their power to make over so enormous a gift. All the rest of her world, therefore, though they might be credited with the most splendid intentions, were left out of the category; it must needs be one of these two.

Again, she felt certain it was not Mr. Wardlaw. He had more than once made her the most generous offers, which she had had some difficulty in declining; but he had at last been brought to understand that she wished—even where favour was no obligation—to maintain her independence, and he knew her far too well to imagine that the largeness of the bribe would have any effect upon her resolution. No, it was not Mr. Wardlaw: it must, therefore, be Raymond Pennicuick. But although Nelly had guessed rightly enough from whom the splendid gift had come, she was not quite sure of the fact, and, in any case, she was wholly ignorant *why* it had come. The only thing she knew for certain was that its coming had given her no pleasure.

Late in life, when the value of money has become impressed upon us (often by harsh experience), and when the needs of those dear to us are importunate, any 'windfall' that honestly falls to us is welcomed as a godsend; but in youth we have not only scruples,

we invent dilemmas. What right, thought Nelly, had Raymond to thus load her with his bounty, and especially without a word or a line to temper it? Could he be so childish as to imagine she would accept the money as a fairy gift, so that she might have a fortune, as it were, in her own right, and be on equal terms to marry him? As to accepting it, or rather as to refusing it, her mind was at once made up, though that rapid conclusion had not been arrived at from the least guess at his motives, but from another supposition, which, though dismissed as unworthy, had refused to take its dismissal, Her difficulty was, what immediate steps to take with respect to this sum—how, in short, to acknowledge its receipt and to return it. The Wardlaws, she well knew, would advise her to keep it; they had a simple belief that nice people who wanted this world's goods ought to have them from the hands of those who had plenty to spare; and it must be allowed that they had the generosity of their opinions. She could not, therefore, apply for advice to them. But there was this kind Mr. Pearson, who took common-sense, if somewhat severe, views of life, and whose disinterestedness in the matter would make him a proper judge. She therefore resolved to consult him; and as indisposition or some other cause prevented his coming to Gower Street as usual, she determined to call upon him at his lodgings. On this errand she of course took Janet with her, though the attendance of that faithful watch-dog had of late been dispensed with when Mr. Pearson was in her studio; the relations between tutor and pupil having become so cordial as to make that conventionality an affectation.

Upon inquiry at the artist's lodgings they found that he was within, and, sending up her name, Nelly was informed that he would see her in a few minutes.

'Mr. Pearson has not been ill, then?' inquired she of the lodging-house servant.

'Well, no, ma'am, not to say ill—or at least, no badder than usual.'

This relieved Nelly's mind, but at the same time surprised and perhaps a little vexed her. She had flattered herself that he would have come to Gower Street unless absolutely incapacitated from so doing.

Mr. Pearson seemed to understand this, for as soon as she entered his parlour, which was on the second floor, he began to explain matters. 'I have had troubles, my dear young lady, and matters that required my personal attendance elsewhere; but my thoughts have been with you.'

'And you have not been well,' said she gently. His face, indeed, was an apology in itself: it was paler and more weary-looking than ever; the eager look that it had once worn was gone, and had been replaced by one of settled melancholy.

'Oh, I have been well enough; but not quite up to giving lessons,' said he gently. 'I have been working at home, you see.'

On his easel was a half-finished sketch; but the walls of the room were bare. Nelly comprehended at once that he could not afford to keep his works beyond the day on which they were finished. This man was little better than a pauper, while she had lying at her banker's more than 20,000*l*.

'Well,' continued he, smiling, 'this is not a professional visit, I suppose?'

'No, Mr. Pearson, I should not have ventured on that course, much as I miss your teaching. Yet I came on a purely selfish errand. The fact is, I need the advice of a friend most sorely.'

'That is well: since it is one of the few things that it is in my power to give you. What is your trouble?—for I see that there *is* trouble, my dear.'

'Well, I have had a fortune given to me.'

'You mean *left* to you,' said Mr. Pearson quietly. He had a pencil in his hand, and was sketching carelessly upon a slip of paper on the table while he spoke, as though fortunes were left every day to those who need them.

'No, I mean what I say—*given*. A very large sum has been paid anonymously into my banker's hands.'

'How much?'

'No less than 21,000*l*.'

'Ah!' returned the other quickly. The magnitude of the sum seemed to have overset his philosophy for the moment; but he presently added in his usual tone, 'That is, as you say, quite a fortune. I congratulate you with all my heart.'

'Yes, but I am not going to take it.'

'What?' said he, rising to his feet, and for the first time, in her eyes, wearing a look of severe displeasure. 'You must be mad, my dear young lady: or if not mad, profoundly ignorant. Do you know that 20,000*l*. is a sum for which, before now, brave men have bartered life, and men who thought themselves honest, honour; a sum which in bad hands is a source of evil to hundreds, and in good hands, such as yours, is a fountain of good?'

'I do not underrate its value, dear Mr. Pearson; but even money, as I have heard Mr. Wardlaw say, may be bought too dear.'

'Mr. Wardlaw! what does *he* know about it?' answered the other excitedly; 'a man that has laid pound to pound from his boyhood, and never knew what poverty means.'

'Indeed, Mr. Pearson, he has told me he was once very poor.'

'To begin with; yes: then he, least of all men, can be a judge in this matter. It is those who have been gently nurtured, and brought up in comfort, who, when the stroke of adversity falls, have the tender skin. What the gods send you, take and be thankful for it, and ask no questions for conscience' sake. The Bible itself tells you so.'

'I don't think the Bible quite says that,' replied Nelly, smiling.

'Then look at *me*, my dear young lady, and from that sad spectacle take your warning. I am old before my time; I am dying before my time; I have lived a life of anxiety and wretchedness, and all for want of that dross which you so ignorantly despise.' He was indeed a sorry sight. His hollow eyes, his shrunken cheeks, his thin grey hair, his hoarse and broken voice, all spoke of privation and distress of mind. 'If you have come here for my advice,' he continued with earnest fervour, 'I have given it you before you asked it. Nay more, I will be frank with you upon another matter. You will never earn more by your pencil than will suffice, as in my case, to keep life within you. And what is life without, I do not say enjoyment, but without leisure, and the power of benefiting others? Long, long ago, dear girl, I thought that death was preferable to such an existence, and now I know it.'

If there was not truth, there was conviction in his every word. As Nelly looked at him, the first temptation she had felt to keep this money occurred to her: 'It is within my power,' was her reflection, 'to make at least one life tolerable.'

He perceived her momentary indecision, and taking her hand in his, whispered with ineffable tenderness, 'Be sane, be wise, and

if you have still a doubt, let my entreaties turn the wavering scale.'

'Indeed, dear Mr. Pearson, they have weight—a weight which I am sure you will regret, since it gives me pain. But I am not here to ask you, shall I accept this gift or not. My mind is made up—to decline it.'

'Why? why? What madness! You say it is anonymous: how know you, then, but some person may have been indebted to those belonging to you—your mother or your father—and have taken this means of payment? It may be conscience-money.'

'It may be; perhaps it is,' she answered, with a flush. 'But if so, not of the kind you hint at. The fact is, I know from whom it comes.'

'Indeed!' He had sat down again, overcome by his excitement and, as it seemed, depressed by the statement of her resolve, but now again he raised his head. 'How *can* you know, since the money was paid anonymously?'

'There are only two persons in the world, Mr. Pearson, in whose power it lay to do this thing; and I am sure it is not one of them. It must therefore be the other. It is Raymond Pennicuick.'

Mr. Pearson poured himself out a glass of water from a caraffe on the table, before he answered; and she noticed that his hand shook like a palsied man's.

'Well, my dear young lady, and why not? He has become, I suppose, a rich man. His father was a friend of *your* father's, and it is probable that before he died he enjoined this act upon his son. When he was alive, as I understand, he offered to pay you an

annuity; and when about to die, it is comparatively easy even for a close-fisted man, to be extremely liberal.'

Nelly shook her head. 'In that case Raymond would have told me, Mr. Pearson. He is not a man to take the credit of another's gift.'

'He has taken no credit to himself at all that I can see.'

'It is the same thing. He must know that I should identify him with the giver; at all events—which is all that we need consider—I have done so. Mr. Pearson,' Nelly went on, with quivering lips, 'it is fair, since I come to ask your counsel, it is only fair that I should have no secrets from you.'

Here that gentleman, softly rising, took the astonished Janet by the shoulder, and, opening the door of an inner apartment, put her quietly within it, and there left her.

'There was a time,' continued Nelly in low tones, 'when Raymond Pennicuick asked me to become his wife.'

'I have heard or guessed as much; and you refused him?'

'Yes: but not because I did not love him: it was because I would not be the cause of quarrel between him and his father. And now—I have thought of this, and put it from me, again and again—and, mind you, it is not *like* him; the suggestion I am about to make does his nature, so far as I have known it, grievous wrong; but the facts compel it—and now, I say, that he has become his own master, and the master of his father's wealth, he sends me this huge sum, without a line of explanation, or a word of kindness.'

'Well?' for she paused—while the colour mounted to her very forehead.

'You said, Mr. Pearson, there was such a thing as conscience-money.'

'I see,' he answered gravely. 'You think he has sent you 21,000*l.* by way of compromise, because he does not mean to ask you again to be his wife.'

'Heaven forgive me if I wrong him,' answered Nelly, 'but so it seems.' She covered her face with her hands—and burst into tears.

'My dear young lady, this must not be,' said Mr. Pearson tenderly. 'If this notion of yours is true, the man is not worth a thought, much less a tear. And if it is not true, we are, as you say, doing him grievous wrong in supposing it. As to his not coming to you, or writing to you, his position, after your rejection of him, is very delicate.'

'He wrote to me about the Dhulang matter,' sobbed poor Nelly. 'He is not like you; he *can* write if he chooses. You may say indeed that it is not to be expected with his father but a few days dead—but then, why have sent the money? He should have had no thought of money at such a time, but since he had'—she could say no more, but broke down utterly. For weeks she had not spoken to a friend; and weakened by solitude and helpless thought, this blow had fallen upon her—to be despised as she imagined (for in such sad straits we are apt to imagine slights) by the man she loved. 'Forgive me, sir, for I have no right to trouble you,' said she, recovering herself; 'you must blame your own kindness as much as my own selfishness; and, alas! I have no friend but you whose counsel I can ask on such a subject—you would not wish me now to touch that money, sir?'

'No, my dear girl, I would not; no, no, no. That would be degradation. But remember, we are not *sure*.'

'That is what my heart says still, dear Mr. Pearson, but my reason contradicts it.'

'Then your heart is still his?' put in the other gravely.

'I did not say so,' said she passionately; 'I never told himself so. That is nothing now. What I came here to ask you for is counsel. What am I to say, what am I to do? To draw a cheque for this huge sum, and then return it, would be the simplest way; but then if by any chance it should *not* be Raymond!'

Mr. Pearson rose and began to pace the room uneasily. 'It is a difficult question, my dear girl: there is, as you say, a possibility—and to suggest such a gift, if undesigned, would be intolerable. Are you *sure* that there is no other friend who has this power?'

For an instant her thoughts flew to Herbert Milburn; he was rich, he had loved her with an unselfish love, and he had departed (Mrs. Wardlaw said because Nelly had rejected him) to a foreign land. Being without hope of her, it was just within possibility that his generosity of soul might have dictated such an act: it was not vanity that suggested this, but simply that the affair was so extraordinary that it evaded all reasonable solution, and yet she felt a sense of shame at having entertained such a conjecture.

'No, there is no other,' said she at last. 'I am quite sure.'

'Will you promise not to move in the matter until I have thought over it—until I see you again?'

'I will, dear Mr. Pearson. But I entreat you, do not delay your decision. So long as I hold this money in possession it is as molten gold to the hand that clasps it.'

Then she thanked him warmly and took her leave, not without more tears, for her nerves were greatly shaken.

When his visitor was gone, Mr. Pearson too, strange to say,

showed more signs of emotion than when she had been present. He continued to pace his room, though it was plain the exertion wearied him, while frequent mutterings showed his brain was busy in her behalf. 'Poor girl, dear girl,' would drop from his white lips in accents of tenderest pity; then they would grow rigid, as he murmured 'Right is Right'; and then again 'Dead, Dead! what profit though the tree be fallen, if we miss the fruit?'

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MYSTERY.

It was not Raymond Pennicuick's fault that his father died, as such men mostly do die, without friends or kin about him, and with hireling hands to close his eyes. Raymond was dutiful enough, and none the less so though the confession Ralph Pennicuick had made had, as he had himself foreseen, deprived his son of his dearest hope. He would have continued to remain under the sick man's roof and to have tended him with all care and gentleness, but that the patient himself had expressed a wish to the contrary. From the moment he had entrusted his shameful secret to his son, he had resumed towards him his old manner; he had become cynical, suspicious, hard, again, so far at least as his waning powers permitted him to be; where he had been violent, he was irritable; where he had been caustic, he was curt and peevish. Perhaps he regretted his confession; perhaps he resented the fact that Raymond possessed his secret, and would fain show him that in spite of that Ralph Pennicuick was master still. At all events, that momentary flow of natural tenderness had stopped, having perhaps exhausted the reservoir.

Thus it happened that when the end came, which it did a few days after the interview we have recorded, the dying man was

attended by Hatton only. The Doctor and Raymond were of course sent for, but arrived too late to find him alive. He had made some movement which had roused his servant, who was sleeping in a chair by the bedside. He had raised himself on his elbow and was looking straight before him in a manner which Hatton described as 'unked'—the vulgar English for 'uncanny.' 'I am coming,' said he, in tones that despite their weakness were still harsh and resolute.

'Master, what is it?' inquired Hatton.

'It is Death,' was the calm reply; 'I am about to meet him face to face.'

And it *was* Death.

Who it was that Ralph Pennicuick was about to meet, the man of course did not know, though he knew enough of his master's opinions to feel sure that he was not referring to the Eternal Judge.

'That's what he said, Mr. Raymond; "I am about to meet him face to face;" only those words and no more, and then he fell back, and I saw by his looks that it was all over.'

Raymond knew whom his father had felt he was about to meet only too well, and those last words spurred on a purpose with which his mind had been busy for many a day. That very evening Raymond sent for Mr. Tatham and said, 'You must procure me one-and-twenty thousand pounds at once'—for there was interest to be paid on that shameful debt as well as the principal.

The lawyer stood aghast, as well he might; he had not been unaccustomed to the spectacle of a greedy heir, but such a request as this at such a time surpassed all his experience: to hear it, too, from the lips of Raymond Pennicuick of all men, fairly astonished him.

'Good heavens, sir, when the breath is scarce out of your father's body!'

'He was *my* father, not yours!' cried Raymond, with a look and tone that reminded the lawyer of Ralph himself; 'what I ask of you is, not your approval, but the thing itself.'

'But, sir, the will has not been read, or rather we do not know for certain that there is no will.'

'You do know that. If you cannot raise this money immediately—at once—I can find those who can, though I pay twice as much for it a fortnight hence. I tell you I must have it.'

And somehow or other Mr. Tatham contrived, within a marvellously short time, and doubtless at some considerable cost, to get it. Then, by his client's directions, he paid it with all possible secrecy into Miss Ellen Conway's account at her banker's. Raymond thought it better for Nelly's sake that it should be done through him than to select any other confidant. 'I am at liberty,' he said, 'to tell you this much and no more, Mr. Tatham, that in paying this money I am only discharging a just debt.'

The lawyer bowed, and, being an astute man, never again so much as referred to the question of 'value received.'

From that moment a great weight was lifted off Raymond's mind, but it was still very far from being at peace. He had inherited something else besides his father's money—the sense of his shameful conduct. The knowledge of the evil he had wrought on his dead friend, and of his subsequent baseness, affected him as though it were a taint in his blood. To hear his father spoken of, even in the way of condolement with himself, was distressing to him; such words were to his ears not even 'the vacant chaff well meant for grain,' they were smooth lies, probably known to be

such by the speakers themselves, but at all events known so to be sometimes by him. It was still worse to hear the dead man spoken of, as he did, with that frankness used by men of the world, who had once called themselves his friends. In a railway carriage one day, not long after the funeral, he had heard two such men, known to him by sight, though he was a stranger to them, discussing his father's character.

'They used to call him Steel Pen, you know,' said one; 'and indeed he was a man of iron every way—including his heart.'

'But it seems he broke up at last; we may be sure, however, he never melted.'

'He is melting *now*, if there's any truth in what the parsons say,' and then they both laughed aloud.

It matters nothing to *us*, probably, what men may say of us when we have played our parts in this world, but it does matter, sometimes, to those who belong to and survive us; and even for their sakes it behoves us to leave a decent memory.

There were other things, too, that embittered Raymond Pennicuick's life, though to the world it seemed incredible that, being young and prosperous, and having got rid of that incubus his father, he could be otherwise than happy. He had given up all hopes of Nelly Conway. It would probably have seemed to him, in any case, with his scrupulous notions of right and his keen sense of what was becoming, that he must withdraw his pretensions in that quarter after what had happened; that, being who he was, he could not marry her father's daughter; but at all events the opinion of Ralph Pennicuick himself had settled that matter for his son. If such a union seemed to his father's eyes to be impossible and not to be contemplated, it must indeed, reasoned Raymond,

be out of the pale of propriety; forgetting that, though unhappily this logic held true enough with respect to other matters (i.e. that his father was anything but a severe judge on a question of duty), yet that in this particular instance the horror of his own crime, or its consequences, had made him for once both sensitive and scrupulous. Raymond had, we say, given up all hopes of Nelly, but unfortunately he could not help thinking about her. It was not yet certain that she had accepted the 21,000*l.* without suspicion of the source from which it had come, or even that she had accepted it at all. She had certainly not breathed a word of the matter to Mrs. Wardlaw, whom Raymond had seen, and whom he knew too well to suppose capable of concealing from him such an incident. It seemed to him (what was in fact the case) that the girl was making up her own mind what to do on the subject, and then would take some practical step.

Suppose she should tax him with having sent the money! This idea was terrible to him, for to tell her the truth would be impossible. He was content — no, not content—he had submitted, though he felt that she loved him and had only declined his suit for reasons to his own advantage, to live without her, but it was intolerable to him that she should regard him even from a distance as the man whose father had 'robbed and murdered' hers. Such had been the very terms used by the criminal himself, and he scarcely felt them to be exaggerated. There were times, in his solitude and hopelessness, when he felt that, though he had assured him to the contrary, he had hardly forgiven the father who had stood between him and his love in life, and in death had still more effectually separated them. To lose her, and her good opinion also (so far as it was possible for one so just to condemn the inno-

cent) was not to be endured; and yet sooner or later some explanation would certainly be demanded of him. He began to think how foolish he had been in supposing that a girl so scrupulous would consent to accept so huge a sum without inquiry; and then to fear lest she should inquire of *him.*

From the moment that that apprehension seized him, he was in a fever to be out of her reach. Foreign travel had never had the charms for him that it had for his father: his tastes were homely, as his views on most subjects were what soaring spirits, with a dislike for the proprieties, are wont to term 'narrow' and 'insular;' but now he resolved at once to go abroad. He therefore gave Hatton orders to that effect, and that adroit attendant had all things ready for his journey, including his passport, in a very few hours.

Said Raymond, as he was about to depart, 'I shall give up the rooms in the Albany, but you can stay on here in Lincoln's Inn, Hatton. I shall probably not have much occasion for your services at any time, but for my father's sake, and on account of your long and faithful service to him, I shall certainly not discharge you.'

'You are very good, Mr. Raymond,' returned his attendant quietly; 'but I am thinking of retiring from service altogether. Your ways, you see, sir, are not my old master's ways, though some folks may think them better ones, and I can't say as I relish the idea of Lincoln's Inn after the Halbany.'

Raymond could not restrain a smile; he had never liked the man, but he felt that he had done his duty after a fashion, and sometimes under very unpleasant circumstances. Ralph Pennicuick had been a harsh master, and, as we have said, it was the

wonder of those who knew him best how he had contrived to retain so long Mr. Hatton's services.

'Well, of course you will please yourself, Hatton. If you are resolved to leave me I shall make you a present of one hundred pounds; or if that is insufficient——'

'Well, no, Mr. Raymond; I think under the circumstances that will be handsome.—Thank you, sir.'

He took up the cheque Raymond wrote for him, and placed it in his breast pocket.

'As we are going to part company, Mr. Raymond, and on good terms,' continued he, 'I will give you a piece of good advice in confidence. I would recommend you, when you begin housekeeping *reglar* on your own account, to go over your plate rather oftener than was the custom of your honoured parent.'

'To go over my plate!' repeated Raymond. 'I don't know what you mean.'

'Well, to count it, sir; especially the salvers and tureens and things, which are seldom used. The fact is, sir, we gentlemen's gentlemen don't like to see money lying idle, and some of us are of a speculative turn of mind, especially as respects the Turf. A respectable-looking man, you see, such as yours truly, can raise a good bit of money on plate at the pawnbroker's. I have been very fortunate in my investments myself, but that may not always be the case with my successors. There is not a saltspoon missing, as it happens, but such luck cannot happen both to master and man for ever.—Good-bye, sir, and thank you kindly.'

It was frank, and no doubt well meant of the man, but somehow this revelation awoke other emotions than amusement in Raymond's mind. Even the faithfulness of his unhappy father's

servant, then, had only been secured by self-interest that smacked strongly of dishonesty! How miserable it was to have none to trust, and none to love one, and to wander aimlessly over the wide world, as he was himself about to do! When would he see these old rooms of his again, and, alas! what did he care whether he saw them again or not? The cab was at the door, with his luggage piled, and he was about to descend the stairs, when his clerk put a registered letter into his hand, just come by post. He felt something round and hard in the envelope before he opened it. But he turned his first attention to the letter.

'One who knew your father, and who loves one who is very dear to you, would have half an hour's conversation with you at the above address. It is important for your own interests that you should come at once, as his days—perhaps his hours—are numbered. The enclosed ring will be the writer's credentials for the authenticity of this communication.'

The ring Raymond recognised at the first glance as his father's signet-ring; he had always worn it on his finger before his last expedition abroad; but it had been taken from him by force (as he had stated) by a Chinese official at Dhulang.

How came it now in England, and in the possession of a stranger? There was no signature to the letter: only an address in Bedford Place, and nothing in the contents which pointed to the identification of the writer. But *was* he a stranger? The phrase 'One who knew your father,' would seem to imply that Raymond himself was unacquainted with him, and yet the handwriting did not seem altogether unfamiliar to his eyes. Was it possible that this man had somehow become possessed of his father's secret, and intended to trade upon it? The letter was mysterious,

but it did not give the impression of being treacherous or fraudulent. At all events, the footing on which the writer had placed himself appealed to Raymond's sense of duty. He knew the worst concerning what had happened at Dhulang, but it still remained to preserve, as far as possible, his father's memory from public shame. If this man was what he pretended to be, he might even have something to say in mitigation of that unhappy business. Strange as the matter was so far, it was not stranger (but for the inexplicable presence of the signet-ring) than the allusion made in the letter to Nelly Conway, for to whom save her could the expression 'one who is very dear to you' refer? There was no other person, alas! 'very dear to him' in all the world. The writer said that he himself loved her. Now, the only person of whom Raymond had ever heard as having paid court to Nelly was Herbert Milburn. And Herbert Milburn had been a friend of his father's, and had gone to Dhulang in his company. But Raymond had heard that he had left England for China many weeks ago; and even if it *was* Milburn, why should he communicate with him thus anonymously?

The more he thought of the matter, the more mysterious and impenetrable it became; but it seemed at least of sufficient importance to demand his immediate attention. So Raymond's luggage was taken down from the cab, and he himself was conveyed in it to Bedford Place instead of to the railway station.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE INTERVIEW.

'My name is Pennicuick,' said Raymond to the servant who opened the door to him in Bedford Place. 'I have been asked to call upon some gentleman residing in this house, but whose name I do not know.'

'That is right enough, sir; it is Mr. Pearson. He is very ill at present, but I believe he will see you.'

This information affected Raymond in two ways: it was at once a relief to his mind and a disappointment. Mrs. Wardlaw had informed him that Nelly was taking lessons of a Mr. Pearson, and it was to the last degree unlikely that this artist-tutor could have any personal knowledge to his father's prejudice; on the other hand, this man might easily have guessed or discovered his affection for his pupil, and made use of that information to obtain an interview from interested motives, in which case he had postponed his journey for a very insufficient cause. However, his possession of the signet-ring was a mystery, even in that case, still to be accounted for.

On entering the sitting-room he beheld not so much a man as the skeleton or shadow of one, enveloped in a dressing-gown, and sitting in an arm-chair by the fire.

'I do not rise, Mr. Pennicuick,' said this ghastly figure, in a hollow voice, 'because I am too weak to pay you that courtesy. Pray take a chair.'

Raymond bowed stiffly, and sat down; the sense that he was being made a victim to some kind of artifice was strong upon him.

'You came hither, I conjecture, immediately upon the receipt of my note, and you did well and wisely in so doing; for, as you see'—he pointed to his own haggard frame—'there is not much time to lose. You are sceptical, I perceive, upon that point,' added he, after a moment's silence, and in harsher tones. 'What was it, then, that secured your promptness in acceding to my request?'

'You sent me my father's signet-ring.'

'Well, you got it; what more was there to be hoped for, Mr. Raymond Pennicuick?'

'Nothing.'

'Perhaps, however, there was something to be *feared*?'

Raymond felt his colour changing, but he answered in a firm voice enough, 'I have nothing to fear from any man. You wrote to me, as you stated, from your dying bed; you professed to be a friend (and, so far, I am inclined to believe you) of one who is very dear to me; and you also hinted at some connection with my late father, which your possession of his signet-ring seemed to corroborate. These seemed to afford claims enough upon my attention. But do not suppose that my coming here is any sign of weakness; any attempt at duplicity or extortion——'

'Would fail in your case, I have no doubt,' put in the other curtly; 'nor is it necessary to employ such means towards a gentleman who, without compulsion, and of his own free will, has paid away 20,000*l.* or so.'

'This is intolerable,' said Raymond, rising from his chair. 'If you think to get any advantage from your knowledge of my having of late disbursed that sum, you are mistaken. Since you are acquainted with Miss Ellen Conway, it is no mystery to me how you learnt the fact, though I am surprised indeed that she should have made such as you her confidant.'

'She did not tell me, however, that it was conscience-money.'

'And who are you, sir, that dare to say it was?'

'I am ARTHUR CONWAY.'

Raymond stood aghast. 'It is impossible,' he said; yet his eyes sought the letter that had summoned him, and which he still held in his hand with uncertain glance.

'Yes, the handwriting of a man survives the man himself,' observed the other in answer to it. 'You recognise me now, I see.'

'I do, I do,' answered Raymond with deep emotion. 'I thank Heaven with all my heart that you are a living man.'

'That is not on my own account, however,' answered the other drily.

'To be frank with you, Captain Conway, it is not. My poor father died with—Oh, sir, he told me all that happened.'

'Or what he thought had happened. I guessed as much directly I heard of that act of reparation.'

'Alas, sir, it was not that: reparation was not possible. I did, however, what I could.'

'And at his request?'

'Yes, sir, upon my honour,' exclaimed Raymond eagerly. 'He knew that my first act after his death would be the repayment of the sum he owed you to your daughter, and he approved of it.'

'It was his wont, it seems, to do all things by proxy,' answered the other coldly, 'even to the discharge of his just debts.'

'He suffered, sir, for all he did amiss; ay,' added Raymond, with sudden sternness, 'and he was tricked, imposed upon. I see now how you plotted against him; made his name infamous, and wrecked his peace. It was you, then, and not your ghost, who met him face to face in Westminster. Revenge is sweet to you; you should therefore be well satisfied; for it was you who killed him.'

'Was it so, indeed? Alas, alas! and he was once my friend,' murmured Conway with drooping head. 'Be patient, Raymond. You cannot guess the things that I have suffered—and all wrongfully. Your father also has killed *me*. These grey hairs, these hollow eyes, this shrunken frame, and worse, the changed and hardened heart within me, are all his doing, I came back to England not to right myself, but her you love. Broken, betrayed, despoiled beyond the reach of righting, I had no sense of right but that. What was I to do? Would you have had me appeal to him—who let me perish (as he imagined) in his stead, and kept back the money for which I had sold my life—for justice? There was no justice in him.'

'Captain Conway, I was his son.'

'I feel that, unhappy lad! but you have compelled me to speak in my own defence. Listen awhile, but not to the record of your father's shame. Let that be buried in his grave and mine. My purpose in sending for you here is to avert the miseries that have fallen upon him and me, from you and yours; to confine the evil that has destroyed us both to our own generation.'

The speaker paused for breath, and held his finger up for silence: but there was no fear of interruption from his companion

now. A spark had fallen among the dead embers of his dearest hope, which it seemed to him that a word of his might extinguish.

'Your father left me at Dhulang a prisoner doomed to death, as certainly, as it appeared, as it is certain now. I had no hope of life, and few regrets for it. The people about me, from the highest to the lowest, were cruel, base, and brutal. There was only one man, Fu-chow—his name was mentioned to you, perhaps?—'

Raymond motioned with his head that he knew the man.

'You were told, doubtless, that he was vile and false as all the rest, and so I then believed him to be. He had been friendly to me at first, but when I exchanged places with your father, he had insisted on being bought over like the rest to acquiesce in the substitution. Indeed, he was more obstinate than the others, and stood out for better terms, and we had no choice but to accede to them. No sooner had your father sailed, however, than this man came to me and showed himself my friend. I had done him a service—no matter what—and barbarian as he was, it seems, he was grateful for it. He had influence, he was free, he had money, and more than the average cunning of his race, and he was inclined to save me, and he told me so. I thanked him, but the thing appeared impossible: we had tried every plan already, as I reminded him, and the execution was fixed for the next day but one.

'"I have got a substitute," said he, "who will suffer for you."

'I think in no case would I have consented to such an arrangement, though the desire of life had begun to stir within me as he spoke those words. It was of no use to speak of scruples to the man, but I simply said that no Chinese could be mistaken for me for an instant.

'"I know it," said he. "It is not a Chinese; it is an Englishman."

'I could scarcely believe him, but at all events I could never have permitted the sacrifice of a fellow-countryman in my place. Forgive me, Raymond; I do not blame those that would; life is dearer to some men, Heaven knows, than to others; and mine seemed of little value. I said that that could not be.

'"But this Englishman," said Fu-chow, "must suffer in any case, and the self-same punishment. It is the murderer we saw in prison as we came along."

'Then I remembered that we had visited a Chinese prison some hundred miles away, in which lay an English criminal condemned like me—but for most heinous crimes—to the Ling-chih, i.e. to be cut into ten thousand pieces. It seemed, indeed, since the poor wretch must suffer, that I should be doing him no wrong to exchange places with him.

'"But the man is in gaol," said I, "and distant three days' journey."

'"No, master, he is on his road, and will be here to-morrow," said Fu-chow cunningly. And indeed he had so contrived it. He had taken a dislike to your father—for which, in truth, he had his reasons—and though he had all along had this device to rescue him in his mind, and had even put it in train, he had not intended to tell him of it till the last moment.'

'Great Heaven! then my father's life might have been saved without this shame!' cried Raymond bitterly.

'Perhaps. Let us not dwell, however, on what might have been; evil enough has befallen us, without adding to it by vain regrets. My task is to stop its growth beyond my grave. The man I speak

of arrived at Dbulang the next morning, and on the same night I left the prison accompanied by Fu-chow. Not then, but afterwards, I redeemed your father's signet-ring from the custody of the gaoler, who had robbed him of it, intending to restore it to him under far other circumstances than afterwards took place. I was carried away up the country, and lay in hiding for many weeks. It would have compromised the officials as well as hazarded my own life to let it be known that I was still in existence. I suffered very great hardships, but my greatest pain was the reflection that by that time my dear daughter must have heard of my death, and be enduring—for I knew she loved me well—the pangs of a grief for which there was no need. I took it for granted that she had received news of her worldly prosperity; that your father had telegraphed to her the provisions of the will I had executed, and which was to account (as he and I had agreed upon together) for her change of fortune, but I felt that riches would not compensate her for her father's loss. I was right there—or rather, I should have been, had circumstances turned out as I had shaped them: but I was cruelly deceiving myself, as you know, in the other matter.

'It was stipulated by the Mandarin who had connived at my escape that I should not return to Shanghai, or reveal myself to any of my fellow-countrymen while in China; and it was very easy to maintain my incognito. The privations I had endured, the agonies of mind I had undergone, had greatly altered me, though I had not as yet become the wretched object that you see here. On the other hand, my spirit was not broken: I was going home at last to see my darling child in the prosperity which I had earned for her. For the money, as you are aware, was to be paid for the risk I ran, and not for the sacrifice of my life itself, though indeed the risk and death

seemed one. Fu-chow, faithful to the last, furnished me with funds sufficient to pay my passage home in the steerage of an English steamer, and I took my berth in it under the name of Pearson, as a merchant's clerk. It was not for many days after we got to sea that I learnt that your father had not fulfilled his solemn promise given to me on that prison pallet, far more terrible than any death-bed. The catastrophe at Dhulang was a frequent subject of conversation on board, but I had kept aloof from my fellow-passengers, and it was quite by chance that I heard how "that poor devil Conway" had left nothing behind him save his sad story.

'That news, Raymond Pennicuick, seemed to take ten years from a life that I had good cause to know would in no case have been a long one. And yet I felt I must needs live on for my revenge. Food I could not take, but on the thoughts of that revenge I lived throughout that hateful voyage. You may see in me to what such diet brings a man.'

Here he paused, partly from failing breath, partly from an emotion which, throughout his narrative, from time to time utterly overpowered him.

'On my arrival in England I found that what I had heard of your father's conduct was but too true. My wife was dead; my child was in poverty and dependence; Ralph Pennicuick, who had robbed them and his dead friend, was, on the other hand, as prosperous as ever, and about to become a member of Parliament. Do you wonder that I swore to become his evil genius? For your own sake and for mine, I spare the details of how I kept my oath. I would not have wounded you, Raymond Pennicuick, by telling even this much, had it not been necessary to the happiness of others. Had I painted your father's conduct in brighter and less

faithful colours, my own would have seemed darker by its side, and that it was my purpose to avoid; not, believe me, for my own sake,—for what opinion you or any living being, save one, may form of me is, to one in my case, not worth the breath with which you may express it. I wish to stand excused in your sight for another reason. You love my daughter, and the knowledge of your father's behaviour towards me has alone kept you, since his death, from giving sign of it. Am I right or wrong?'

'You are right, sir. I was quitting England lest haply I should have to tell her with my own lips the story of my father's shame.'

'Just so. Now, it struck me, if this man has so tender a conscience—inherited from your mother, lad, a saint in heaven—and I tell him less than the bare truth to spare his feelings, he may think *me* in my turn so base (for revenge is base, and I too have erred deeply in this matter) that he may well shrink from wedding with one of my blood. As it is, both your father and I have sinned against one another—I will not say in what proportion—and have both repented. Put us both, as far as may be, out of your mind: and at all events, let not our acts affect your future conduct. I am speaking, of course, under the supposition that you and Nelly love one another; it seemed to me so from what I gathered from her letters, and my last words, or what I felt to be my last, at Dhulang, were to entreat your father to consent to your union.'

'The greatest sorrow, save one, sir,' observed Raymond, 'of my poor father when he lay a-dying was that his confession must needs rob me of your daughter's love.'

'And now it need not rob you. He never took my life, that's plain: and if he defrauded me, his son has made reparation for him.'

'But when she comes to know all, sir,' urged Raymond despairingly, 'she is so pitiful, and just, and pure, that the thought of the wrongs you have suffered, and at such hands——'

'Hush, hush! no matter, lad. She shall never know them,' answered Conway solemnly. 'Have I gone through so much for her sake to draw back now—so near the close! No, I will die and make no sign. She shall never know she has a father.' He hid his face in his thin hands and groaned.

'Oh sir, I could not, even to win Nelly's love,' cried Raymond, deeply moved, 'exact such a self-sacrifice. What! after so many years, and the last so full of pain and care, to ask you to give up your single solace, the one hope of those dark days; to forbid you to call her "daughter," to let you die a stranger to your child! No, never!'

'You have a kind heart, Raymond Pennicuick. Nelly will be in safe hands,' moaned the old man. 'Let that suffice for me.'

Raymond shook his head. 'I could not build my happiness upon the ruin of yours, sir. To deprive you of your daughter's love would be the worst robbery of all: and besides, what explanation can be given her, save the true one, respecting that act of reparation, and my own silence and neglect of her? She would be as far out of my reach as ever, and you will have suffered to no purpose.'

'Nay, I have thought of that, and made provision for it. Suffer!—yes, I shall suffer, but I am used to that. It cannot now be for long. Oh, if I could clasp her to my heart, and cry, "My child, my child!" just once, then death were welcome.'

'You shall do that, sir,' said Raymond firmly, 'and find, I trust, new life from that sweet solace. She shall come here this

day, though I myself should fetch her, and meet her only to part from her for ever.'

He had risen and seized his hat, as one who, fearful of his own weakness, must needs act at once or fail to act at all.

'Stay, stay, dear lad,' cried Conway hurriedly; 'I have a device to save us both. We must deceive her for her own good; or rather, tell her a half-truth, since the whole would ruin all. I will spare your father's memory all I can, and that too at the expense of my own good name; yet something bitter must be told. Will you trust me, Raymond, as your advocate?'

'Indeed, indeed I will, sir.'

'Then leave me now, for my strength is almost gone, and return hither—it is just noon—at four. Then you shall learn my plan.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RECONCILIATION.

NELLY had waited for many days, and not without impatience, to hear, according to promise, from Mr. Pearson; his judgment, it seemed, took a long time to mature. But she knew he was far from well, and had forborne to trouble him. His counsel would be given at last, and she felt sure would be both wise and just. Only, in the mean time, it fretted her to feel that that great sum of money still lay in her hands, and that he who had placed it there must be wondering at her silence, or perhaps taking it for granted that she was disposed to quietly accept it without question. It was only when 'her light was low'—when loneliness and the toil she did not love so much as she had flattered herself she did, oppressed her more than common, that she verily and indeed believed that this money had been given as a peace-offering on Raymond's part; but the very fact that it was open to such a construction, though only to her own mind, brought a flush of wounded pride into her cheek. She longed to get quit of this unwelcome wealth, and to return it to its rightful owner: though how to do it perplexed her as much as ever. Mr. Pearson, however, had promised to seek out a way.

In about a fortnight after her visit to him, he sent word one

afternoon that he should be happy to see her between four and five, and she concluded at once that he had found some means of meeting her difficulty. Of course she was punctual at the time appointed. At a quarter past four she presented herself with her usual attendant in Bedford Place, and was ushered into Mr. Pearson's parlour: but that gentleman was not in his usual place. The apartment was empty. The maid had said that her master was not so well as usual, so Nelly concluded that he had not yet left his bedroom. When one is waiting in a new place, with nothing particular upon one's mind, one looks about one: Nelly, who was preoccupied, sat by the window with her eyes fixed on the houses opposite, but without observing them; Janet, on the other hand, who had no *mauvaise honte*, and who had a curiosity inherited from her mother and sharpened by the practice of letting lodgings, made a tour over the little room. She scrutinized the sketch upon the easel—the same, alas, and in the same stage of progress as it had been when they called last, for Mr. Pearson was now too ill to work; she criticised the empty frames that stood in the corner against the wall; she moved the arms and legs of the lay figure into postures unknown to art or nature; and then she gravitated towards the looking-glass and stuck there.

Miss Janet Handsel was not good-looking, but she was accomplished—that is to say, grown up: and it was only natural that she should regard her countenance with satisfaction. 'To see ourselves as others see us' is a very meritorious desire, and it was probable she would have spent her time thus profitably until Mr. Pearson made his appearance, but for another object of interest which presented itself: also a young lady's face, or the photograph of one, stuck in the corner of the mirror. If

any had approached the mantelpiece less devoted to self-contemplation than Miss Handsel, it must have met their eyes at once.

'Lawks a mussy, Miss Nelly, why, here's your pictur!'

'My picture!' returned Nelly, rousing herself from her reflections. 'Where?' She had a notion that Mr. Pearson might have amused himself by making a sketch of her, and this awakened a languid interest.

'Yes, your pictur,' repeated the girl in answer to her look, 'or leastways a photo. It was taken a year or two ago, I should say, but it's as like you, Miss, as it can stare.'

Nelly took the photograph and gazed upon it intently. She had had it taken three years ago upon her birthday, in order to send her father a copy. She had given one or two only to other people—such as Raymond and Mrs. Wardlaw—and they were not persons likely to have parted with such a gift. How came, then, this copy here? She turned the photograph round, and looked at the back; then cried out suddenly, 'Janet, leave me. I wish to be alone.'

Janet was naturally hard of hearing, but deafer than any stone when she didn't wish to hear what was said.

'It's as pretty a pictur as ever I saw,' was her reply.

'Go downstairs, Janet, and wait for me. I wish to have a few words with Mr. Pearson alone.'

It was impossible, unless she had had the gift of blindness as well as of deafness, to misunderstand what her mistress meant; and Janet left the room accordingly.

Nelly sat down with her hands pressed close upon her beating heart; she had read the date on which it was taken, and the words

'For my darling father,' in a still childish scrawl; it was without doubt the very picture she had sent to China.

'My dear young lady, I fear I have kept you waiting.' Mr. Pearson stood before her in his dressing-gown, looking very aged and ill, but with a gracious light in his eyes that she had not seen before: he had been always kind to her, but his haggard face had hitherto never worn even a gleam of joy.

'I have given my best attention to the case you have put before me,' continued he slowly.

'Thanks, Mr. Pearson, but first—first of all,' said Nelly, speaking with difficulty—for not only was she greatly moved, but something in her companion's face, tenderly as it smiled upon her, imparted an inexplicable awe—'I wish to know about this picture; it is a photograph of myself that I sent to my dear father long ago. How came it in your hands? Did you know him? Did he give it you? No, I cannot believe that,' for the other nodded in grave assent. 'Who are you?'

Mr. Pearson, who had taken his usual seat, took up a pen, and, writing down four words on a piece of paper, passed it to her. 'Do you know that handwriting, Nelly?'

The words he had written were familiar enough to her—the usual ending to those most precious treasures, her father's letters; 'Yours lovingly, Arthur Conway.'

'Oh father, father!' she rose, and tottered to his feet, and fell into his outstretched arms.

'Be calm, be brave, my darling,' he murmured, caressing her fondly. 'I need all my strength to bear this joy.'

Had he appealed to any other motive than her solicitude for his own health, Nelly felt that she must have given way to her

emotions. The sudden shock of happiness, though broken to her with gentlest care, had overwhelmed her quite.

'You must not mind my tears, darling,' continued her father softly; 'I am used to trouble, but not to happiness like this, and you must help me to bear up against it. I have much to tell you, that will tax my feeble powers.'

She had no words of cheer to give him, but smiling like the summer sun through rain, and kissing his withered cheeks, and fingering his gaunt hand with tenderest touch, she strove to tell him how she yearned to yield him strength and comfort, and presently—only give her time—would do so.

'Yes, darling, I have longed for weeks for this day to come,' he said, 'but its promise being so bright and genial, and my winter having endured so long without a glint of sunshine, I had mistrusted its fulfilment. Let me enjoy it now, for it will be brief, Nelly. Let no false scruples, or bitter thoughts of what has passed and gone, mar the bright prospect.'

'Oh father, what *can* mar it? you are here: you will never leave me more.'

'Yes, Nelly, I shall leave you—but not as you fear: only as we all must, one day, leave those we love. There, there! we will not talk of that. I must tell you how it happened that I came home alive.'

Then he told her (but without a word about his having suffered for another's crime) how he had been thrown into prison, and had escaped through Fu-chow's aid, in the manner with which we are acquainted.

'But why did you not come straight to me, father? Why conceal yourself under another name?'

'Hush, hush! not so loud, darling. I have a secret to share with you. Ralph Pennicuick was a false friend.'

'I have heard as much!' sighed Nelly softly.

'Yes, but he is dead and gone, and bygones must be bygones. He owed me money—a huge sum—20,000*l.*'

'Ah, now I see! But how could he possibly come to be your debtor for such an amount?'

'It was a debt of honour.'

Nelly looked very grave. She had heard from her mother's lips, when moved to wrath against her husband, that her father was a gambler. She clung to his thin hand still, and kissed it too, but it was plain she had received a blow.

'Yes, darling; so it was. It was fairly and honourably won; and, strange as it may seem—but you will take your father's word for it—its equal value was staked against it. He acknowledged the debt, though at that time it was only known to him and me; but when he thought me dead, he broke his solemn pledge that he would pay it to those I left behind me.'

'I should not have taken it, father,' murmured Nelly.

'You would if you had known all, dear girl,' answered Conway quietly; 'but let that pass. I returned home, penniless and broken, with one hope in my heart, which has to-day been realised. But it was not so then. No: I came to find you, my darling, almost as poor and friendless as myself; while he, my debtor——'

'Mr. Pennicuick did offer us a handsome income,' put in Nelly gently, 'but my mother would not accept it. After her death it was renewed, and I declined it for the second time.'

'You did well, dear girl. He tried to salve his conscience, and, I am rejoiced to think, in vain. As for me, I was resolved to

have my rights,—though, Heaven knows, not for my own sake,—or, failing that, at least to avenge your wrongs. My heart was bleeding for you, orphaned as you thought yourself, friendless as you were (save for those good souls the Wardlaws), and most unjustly poor. I went to Richmond, where I found—your mother's grave.'

Here the speaker paused. A feeling very different from those by which he had hitherto been moved appeared to actuate him. The passionate agitation with which he had hinted at his wrongs had disappeared; the pathos with which he had described his yearning to behold his daughter was gone; there was remorse as well as regret in his changed tones.

'If right had been done to me, Nelly, she would perhaps have been alive; under brighter circumstances we might have understood one another better: God knows.—How did your mother die? Did she speak of me?'

'She died—very suddenly, father; dropped down and died away from home. But before that, when the report came of your death, she reproached herself bitterly for the misunderstanding between you.'

'It was not all her fault. We were both to blame,' murmured Conway. 'At heart I can well believe she loved me.'

'She did indeed, father.'

'God bless her and forgive us all.—What was I saying, darling?'

'You went to Richmond.'

'Yes, and found you gone to Sandybeach, and followed you. I could not resist looking upon the face that I had pictured to myself so long, and for which that portrait yonder had so long been the only substitute. And I did see you. I was able, you remember, to render you a service.'

'Can I ever forget it? But why was it that, when you had thus given me life for the second time, you did not reveal yourself?'

Her father's brow grew dark.

'I had my reasons. It was necessary that I should not be known to you—to anybody—for the execution of a plan I had formed to get you righted. There is no need to speak of that. Since restitution has been made, we will take for granted it succeeded. I told you at that time I was not my own master; but it was for you, dear Nelly, that I was about to work. My task was difficult, but nothing to what happened after—to the restraint I had to put on myself when I found my daughter in my pupil! Still, for your sake—never mind why; you must trust me here to have acted for the best, Nelly—I kept my secret. I did keep it till my end was gained.'

'What end, father?'

'Well, for one thing, till the money was paid that was your due. I knew, of course, before you told me, who had sent it.'

'Did Raymond know—what you have told me—then?'

'Yes; and hence his silence with respect to you. His father told him all upon his death-bed, and urged him at once to pay the money. The lad needed no such spur. You know his nature, how sensitive it is as well as noble: the shame of what Ralph Pennicuick had done lived after him in his son's mind; and even when that load of infamous debt was off his shoulders, the young man was still bowed down by the recollection of it. "How can she look at me, except with loathing," said he to himself, "whose father robbed *her* father, being dead?"'

'But why was he silent?' inquired Nelly gravely. 'Did he think of me so ill as to imagine that a quarrel about money

between our fathers would have parted me from him? Why was he not frank with me? What right had he to send me that huge sum without a line of kindness? One gracious word would have outweighed it all.'

'Oh, Nelly, do not steel your heart against this lad. He loves you dearly, and I think—I think my darling returns his love. Believe me, he is worthy of it. But for his generosity of soul you would never have called me father. We foresaw your scruples, should you come to hear my story, and I was content to leave it all untold, rather than risk its separating you from Raymond. But he who loves you, and has ever loved, and looks upon you as the dearest treasure earth possesses, refused the sacrifice. "You shall not die," he said, "a stranger to your child." You despise the wealth with which he would have loaded you; but let this gift of his—myself (since it seems you value it)—have weight with you and plead his cause.'

'Oh, father,' faltered the young girl, 'there is no need—if I were sure—but it was months ago since Raymond sought my love, and I withheld it; and it well may be since then (though you think otherwise)——'

'Tut, tut, my girl,' interrupted the old man, drumming on the table with his fingers, 'no fear but that I read his heart aright. Would he have left England, think you, to go none knows whither, had another taken your place in his affections?'

'What! has he left England?' exclaimed she, the colour fading from her cheeks. 'Oh, not, I trust, to wander aimless as his father did?'

'That depends on you, dear Nelly,' said a soft voice behind her. It was Raymond's voice, who, at her father's signal, had stepped

opportunely from the inner room where he had been in waiting all along. 'Without your love all countries are alike to me, and in none shall I find a home.'

His blue eyes gazed upon her with earnest wistfulness, but in an instant their expression changed to tender triumph; he was clasping his darling to his breast.

'Dear Ray, I have always loved you,' was her passionate cry, as she threw herself into his arms.

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNITED.

No veteran lags more superfluous on the stage than do lovers, whose course of love is run, in the pages of fiction. But it must be acknowledged that there were exceptional obstacles to be surmounted in the case of Raymond and Nelly notwithstanding that they had plighted troth. To acknowledge one's parents has before now been found, by persons moving in good society, as difficult a matter as for others to acknowledge their offspring; and the existence of Captain Arthur Conway was a fact the publication of which was likely to be fraught with much more than inconvenience both to himself and other people. For Raymond's sake, or rather for the sake of smoothing for him his way to Nelly's heart, he had to his own daughter pictured his conduct in a way that did him great injustice. He had allowed her to imagine that he had committed the act which had made Pennicuick's life forfeit to Chinese justice; and he had actually borne false witness against himself on the subject of the money owed to him, which, though in one sense a debt of honour, was by no means a gambling debt such as Nelly understood it to be. In thus lowering himself in his daughter's eyes (albeit for her own advantage), and trusting to her loving charity to rectify what seemed to have

been amiss in him, instead of standing on his moral rights, it will be conceded that Arthur Conway had done enough in the way of self-sacrifice. He was not bound to stand in the pillory for the world at large to jeer at. He did not regret his generosity; perhaps he felt that he was atoning by it for the rancour with which he had avenged his wrongs, and which had found vent on the hustings at Slowcombe (for it was he, of course, who had contrived the advertisement about Dhulang) and in the columns of the daily press; but he felt that it had gone far enough. As for personal recognition, except at Nelly's hands, he cared nothing for it. In England he had no friends; and his time was getting far too short to make them. What, then, was to be done, which, while on the one hand, it should give him the companionship of his daughter, should yet not compel him to tell the story he had told to her to the world at large? He could scarcely pass even the brief remainder of his days—for he had told truth in saying they were numbered—under the same roof with her as Mr. Pearson, and yet he felt it would be beyond his powers, having once acknowledged her, having felt those loving arms about him for whose embrace he had yearned for years, to become again, even to others' eyes, a stranger to her.

As often happens, this serious difficulty was surmounted through the pursuance of the path of duty, though it did not seem to lead in the direction of any such relief.

Nelly, even as matters were, conceived that the chief objection to the disclosure lay in the slur that the facts would cast upon Ralph Pennicuick's memory, and in that view was as strongly adverse to it as the other two possessors of the secret; but in Mrs. Wardlaw's case she knew that nothing that could come to light respect-

ing this unhappy man would make that lady's opinion of hi worse than it was already, while she did feel that she owed nothin less to her fond and faithful friend than a frank explanation o her position.

'I think, dear father,' said she, while the subject was unde discussion, 'if you have no vital objection, that an exceptio should be made in the matter of our secret with respect to Mr Wardlaw. Her affection, nay, her devotion, to me has been suc as to make me ashamed not only of my own unworthiness of it but even of the step I took in leaving her to gain my own living it was my duty, as you know, but, though I felt it to be such, also felt that in so doing, contrary to her vehement entreatie I was making a poor return for her unexampled kindness. If conceal my present happiness from her, I shall be depriving her o happiness also, for she loves me—almost' (here she cast a tende look at her father) 'as though I were her own child.'

Conway shook his head, not in absolute negation, but grav doubt; he was a proud man—far prouder, indeed, than Ralp Pennicuick (who passed for proud) had ever been. The hard an selfish man is never proud except in the vulgarest sense; there i always a point with him where self-interest will outweigh degradation. Conway, who had stooped to revenge (for another' sake), possessed a nature otherwise incapable of baseness: he wa very sensitive as to his own honour; he had had a far harde struggle to represent himself as he had done to his daughter tha to sacrifice his life for her at Dhulang; and it was a bitter thoughi to him that another woman—and a good one too—should hav cause to think ill of him.

Another counsel, however, followed on the same side.

'If any words of mine, Captain Conway, may weigh with you,' said Raymond earnestly, 'I beseech you to give ear to Nelly's request. I scarcely think that even she herself is conscious of the love that Mrs. Wardlaw bears to her. My testimony may be considered independent,' added he, 'since I have good reason to believe that it is no fault of that lady's that my darling here is not now Mrs. Herbert Milburn.'

'Independent, sir! not a bit of it,' answered Conway, smiling. 'Whatever this girl says—God bless her! I believe you are prepared to swear to. Well'—this with a little sigh—'let it be as you please.'

Thus it came about that the very next morning Nelly presented herself at Coromandel Lodge. It was the first time she had seen its mistress since she had left the hotel at Sandybeach; not that Mrs. Wardlaw nourished any anger against her, but the good lady hoped that, if she kept aloof, solitude and discomfort would be her best assistants to drive her darling back the sooner to her friendly arms.

'Ah, you are coming back to us, my darling; I see it in your pretty eyes,' was her welcome; 'you could never dare to smile like that if you meant to be as obstinate as ever.'

Then Nelly told her, in brief terms, what was the reason of her having such a happy face: how in Mr. Pearson she had found the father she had so long mourned as dead. Then she went on to say that to none but to so dear and tried a friend as she to whom she spoke would she have confided this, since the disclosure of it would reflect upon Ralph Pennicuick's memory.

'*That* wouldn't hurt it much,' returned Mrs. Wardlaw drily, for she was one of those 'good haters' who, while allowing the force of the *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* argument, still think with the poet that truth should be spoken in any case:

Rien jusqu'ici poursuivre une mémoire ;
Rien—*excepté la vérité.*

'But at least you should consider Raymond, Mrs. Wardlaw.'

'To be sure, my dear ; I have forgotten him : although I must say that the lad has sadly disappointed me. I thought that, when his father was dead, the lad would not have lost a moment——'

'Dear Mrs. Wardlaw,' put in Nelly quietly, 'I have promised to be his wife.'

'You, *darling*!' cried the old lady rapturously, and embraced her on the spot. 'Whatever shall I get you good enough for your marriage present! Oh, when is it to be?'

'Alas, dear Mrs. Wardlaw, my father is in a very critical state of health. I am thinking of nothing but him at present.'

'Then let him come down here at once, and be nursed,' was the other's prompt reply. 'Richmond air is better than London smoke. We have room for half-a-dozen such patients : and I am so fond of him—though I did think him queer—already, you know ; but, Nelly, I must tell John.'

'Of course you must, dear Mrs. Wardlaw. I know your husband's discretion is to be relied upon.'

'Yes, indeed, I wish it wasn't : I mean, I wish he would talk things over a little more. I think his going to all those auctions makes him reticent ; he seems to be afraid of opening his mouth lest he should be knocked down for something without intending it. But I'll manage him, you may rely upon it.'

That very evening she made her approaches, and carried the citadel—her point—though under very disadvantageous circumstances. Mr. Wardlaw had met with a misfortune at a wine sale : he had gone to buy claret, but had tasted some hock which pleased

his palate, and had bidden 35*s.* for it. When it was knocked down to him, he found it was being sold by the bottle and not by the dozen. No wonder he had liked the wine, but he didn't like the price.

It required, therefore, some considerable dexterity on the part of his wife to bring him into his natural condition of mind—which was one, as we know, of the most unbounded hospitality.

When this was attained Mrs. Wardlaw told him Nelly's story, and the difficulty that had arisen of bringing father and daughter under the same roof.

'He must be disposed of by private contract,' said Mr. Wardlaw thoughtfully.

'What on earth do you mean, John? how can you be thinking of your auction sales on such an occasion as this?'

'I mean, there can be no public competition for the pleasure of his presence, my dear; why shouldn't he come here, to Coromandel Lodge? His daughter will come, of course, to nurse him; only we will give out that she has come back to us, as we always wished her to do, and that we have arranged for her having a resident tutor. Yes, that will be a capital plan.'

He did not seem to think there was the least generosity or benevolence in the arrangement; but only that it was a convenient one for all parties.

'John,' said Mrs. Wardlaw, with quiet pride, 'you are a duck:' and she kissed him.

So it came about that Arthur Conway was received at Coromandel Lodge with a welcome with which few sick guests—except very rich ones—are received anywhere; and all out of love and kindness. For Nelly to talk of obligation was, as she protested,

ridiculous, since she owed more than a lifetime could repay to these good friends already.

'Then why *do* you talk of it, my dear?' said Mr. Wardlaw logically. And he forbade the least allusion to it upon Captain Conway's part as being exciting, and therefore prejudicial to the patient's health.

'I can only say,' said the sick man with tears in his eyes, 'that it seems to me, so far as Nelly is concerned, I might just as well have stopped in China, since she has found both father and mother in England.'

'We have only done our best as such,' said Mrs. Wardlaw, 'by proxy.'

Besides these two new inmates of the Lodge there would, 'but for the look of the thing,' as its mistress said, have been a third in the person of Raymond; and, indeed, he was so frequent a guest, that he might almost as well have taken up his quarters there.

All the kindness of this excellent couple could not, however, save Arthur Conway's life; he had no particular ailment, but his whole constitution was broken beyond doctors' mending. He suffered no pain, and was perfectly placid and happy, except that he evinced great anxiety to have the young people married. Nelly combated this notion (though we may be sure it was not otherwise distasteful to her) from the sense that it was unbecoming to think of marriage while the shadow of death, as it were, was hovering over her father: but he gained Mrs. Wardlaw's ear, and through her influence obtained his wish.

'My dear Nelly,' said she, 'you are positively weakening what

little hope remains to us of your father's restoration to health, by your foolish scruples.'

To this Nelly could answer nothing, save that she was in her friend's hands.

The marriage was therefore at once arranged for: even the lawyers did not delay it, since their instructions were simplicity itself. The twenty-one thousand pounds that were, by rights, Conway's own, were taken as his daughter's and settled absolutely upon her, at Raymond's wish, 'for her sole use and benefit.' He was not going to lie under Mrs. Wardlaw's suspicions, he said, the second time. She had thought he had neglected Nelly when she was poor, and might possibly imagine he only married her because she was an heiress. On her resenting this with becoming indignation, he whispered something in her ear, which he flattered himself would cover her with confusion; but it had not that effect at all.

'I know I did,' said she (he had alluded to her advocacy of Mr. Herbert Milburn); 'I thought very well of the young man, and you seemed to have withdrawn from the field. It was my duty to do the best I could do—though it was only the second best of what I wished—for Nelly. I liked you very much, Raymond Pennicuick, but I liked my darling more.'

'And quite right too, dear Mrs. Wardlaw,' cried the young fellow, 'and I love you (if your husband, and Nelly, will permit me to say so) all the better for so doing.'

But Mr. Herbert Milburn was always a subject of pleasant—though quite private—raillery between Mrs. Wardlaw and Raymond.

The marriage was of course a very quiet one: indeed, no guests were bidden to it; but that did not prevent the arrival of many marriage presents. As the rain falls most plentifully upon moist ground, so, when folks are rich and do not want them, these gifts are always in the greatest profusion. It was astonishing how many acquaintances of Nelly Conway's—about whom she knew almost as little as we ourselves—became her friends when she married Mr. Ralph Pennicuick's son and heir. One present, but not sent from the same motives, arrived several months after Raymond and Nelly were man and wife. It was a magnificent China shawl from Mr. Milburn, forwarded through his sister's hands, 'with dear Herbert's kind regards and best wishes,' to Nelly. The splendour of this gift—only second to one she had received from Mrs. Wardlaw herself—excited that lady's highest commendation.

'I always thought, you know, my dear Raymond,' said she mischievously, 'that our dear Nelly might have done better with herself.'

But that is not our opinion, as indeed it is needless to say it was not seriously hers. There was never a happier married pair than Raymond and Nelly Pennicuick.

At the very first, however, there was a sad trouble, though an expected one. Hardly had Arthur Conway obtained his wish of seeing his daughter wedded than Death claimed him. Indeed, the young couple were summoned from their wedding tour to his death-bed. He was alive when they arrived, and that was all. His mind was wandering chiefly on matters that had taken place at Dhulang; and I think that from his wild talk—joined with certain suspicions of her own—Nelly learnt more of the true state of the case than when in his right mind he had told her. If so, she

only loved him more, not her husband less; and indeed, in what had he offended? A bad son may indeed sometimes lay his sins at his father's door; but for a father's sins what son can be answerable?

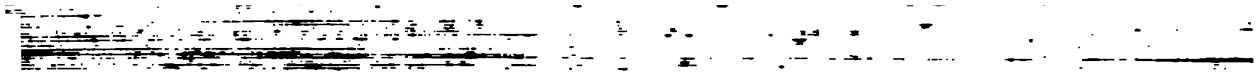
Just at the last, as often happens, Conway's wandering wits returned to him. He recognised his daughter and bade her a loving farewell.

'I shall see her, and we shall be made one again through you, my darling,' were his last words. 'Let me be buried in the same grave with her.'

It was an inexpressible comfort to poor Nelly that her father's last thoughts had reverted—and in such tender fashion—to her mother.

THE END.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET



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